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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

AN INQUIRY INTO THE EXPERIENCES OF MODERN DANCERS IN ENHANCED PERFORMANCE STATES

©

by: Tamara Colleen Bliss

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of MASTER OF ARTS.

FACULTY OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND RECREATION

Edmonton, Alberta

Spring 1996

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled **AN INQUIRY INTO THE EXPERIENCES OF MODERN DANCERS IN ENHANCED PERFORMANCE STATES** submitted by **TAMARA COLLEEN BLISS** in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of **MASTER OF ARTS.**

Marsha Padfield
Dr. Marsha Padfield

J.M. Hogg
Dr. John Hogg

Pat Rafferty
Dr. Pat Rafferty

Date Jan. 29, 1996

'Oh body swayed to music, O brightening glance,

How can we know the dancer from the dance?'

Among School Children
William Butler Yeats 1927

DEDICATION

This body of work is dedicated to all dancers who love their art form and get "high" on dance.

ABSTRACT

The dancer in performance is capable of experiences that surpass ordinary perceptions of the body and mind, sometimes referred to as the dancer's "high." These experiences are often difficult for the dancer to describe and are perceived as exhilarating and rare. For the dancer who has experienced this level of performance or higher state of consciousness, it could very well represent the heart and soul of dance. This thesis investigates the unique performance states of professional modern dancers whose usual levels of performance are experienced as enhanced and/or heightened.

Little has been written about the modern dancer's experience in enhanced performance states whereas more information is available regarding the athlete, particularly in flow, peak performance and peak experience. This study documents the occurrence of enhanced performance states in six professional modern dancers. Their illuminating descriptions of the qualities and characteristics of enhanced performance experiences resemble those studied previously in athletes.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Dance for the dancer is experienced wholly as a way of life; an ongoing process that leads to performing. Everything a dancer does in preparation for performance is done for comparatively fleeting moments on the stage. It is not a glamorous existence. Street clothes are a novelty to most dancers. Instead, a dancer lives in sweaty layers of form fitting, unrestrictive dancewear, often coupled with the smell of Tiger Balm or Ben Gay. The look is accented by the occasional Ace bandage used to help support and soothe the latest and recurrent results of continued physical overuse. Much time is spent fine tuning the body in a daily class consisting of rigorous physical preparation; strengthening, stretching, and articulating through a variety of movement styles. The rehearsal process usually follows this preparation which involves the assimilation of set choreography and improvisation. (*Improvisation is a method or tool for creating and discovering new choreographic movement.*) It is a continuous process whereby improvised and choreographed movement skills are practiced and refined repeatedly until the whole dance picture begins to take shape.

Dance is an expressive, physical art form. The language of dance is movement and it is used to communicate ideas and feeling

states through symbolic imagery. The dancer's body is the instrument of expression through which this communication takes place. The more finely tuned the dancer's body is, the more articulate and communicative the body as instrument becomes. The dancer, in pursuit of technical precision and clarity of expression, follows rigorous training to transform the body into this fine articulate tool. It is part of the process of learning to perform.

Technical achievement is one well-deserved outcome of this process, but dance demands the best of both mind and body. It combines the synthesis of discovery and the pursuit of physical perfection. Consequently, this process yields more than the feeling of technical accomplishment, or of fulfilling a narcissistic urge to be watched by others while performing unusual or beautiful physical feats. The body and mind of the dancer are trained as *one communicative, expressive whole,* capable of performing even through fatigue. It is at this point that something else can begin to occur: a shift which exceeds ordinary perceptions of the body and the mind. Altered and real sensations emerge as uncommon but illuminating experiences. These feelings may be difficult for the dancer to describe and might even seem unlikely. For the dancer who has encountered this level of performance, the experience could very well represent the

heart and soul of dance. This shift is identified as an enhanced performance state.

Statement of the Problem

Knowledge of these states, also referred to as altered states of consciousness (Nideffer, 1992) is by and large, limited. Encounters of altered perceptions of time and surroundings that have occurred while the researcher was deeply immersed in a personal dance role, remain little nuggets in my memory. These moments continue to fuel my keen passion for dance in every dance role that I experience: performer, choreographer, instructor, designer, and now researcher. Remarkably, it is a state that many dancers experience yet few talk about it; not because it is unbelievable, but perhaps because it remains an unspoken "understood." Not only are these enhanced states experienced in the performance setting, but the dancer may encounter them at any time they are dancing: in class, in rehearsal, or in performance. These enhanced moments occur when conscious, cognitive control of the body and mind is expanded, developed through rehearsals and repeated performances. The elements of the dance become etched into the dancer's very being or, when body and mind have been prepared to a point of optimal readiness. The dancer

and dance become one. Thus, the physical movement of the dance becomes firmly established, and the conscious thought processes become automatic. Unnecessary nervousness, anxiety, and worry may also be put behind the performer at this level of experience. What remains is the essence of dancer and dance, seemingly indiscernible from one another for both dancer and audience. For the dancer who experiences this state, a pinnacle or "high" of performance, dance is its own intrinsic reward.

Flow, Peak Experience, Peak Performance

Enhanced performance states have been studied in a variety of contexts. **Flow, peak experience**, and **peak performance** are but three of these states recognized in the current literature. Each one possesses slightly different foci but share many similar qualities. In turn, characteristics of these states correspond to those defined in Altered States of Consciousness or ASC.

The characteristics of the experiential states of peak experience and peak performance, are often indistinguishable from those called flow. *Peak experience* as defined by Maslow (1962, 1965, 1971) and *peak performance* as defined by Jackson and Roberts (1992), share many distinctive features with the process of *flow* (Csikszentmihalyi

1975, 1990). Privette (1981, 1983), and Privette and Bundrick (1991), have extensively studied performance states from a psychological perspective resulting in a detailed descriptive analysis of the constructs of peak performance, peak experience and flow. Though these concepts share some common characteristics, they are not synonymous. Yet, the definitions developed to delineate one concept from the other, are not always clear. They may overlap one another and it seems, may even occur simultaneously. Further, each one fits to some extent within the descriptions of ASC.

Flow: The flow experience describes an optimal mental state, one involving total absorption in the task or activity in which one is engaged (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Subsequently, when the person's skill is matched to the task or activity, the quality of the experience is also enhanced. One of the clearest signs of flow is the experience of merging action and awareness. Because flow produces harmony within the self, the activity at hand takes all the focus, leaving little or no room to think about anything else. In flow, the self is fully functioning, but not aware of itself doing it, resulting in a loss of personal ego (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975, 1988). Another feature that flow shares with peak experience and peak performance is a distorted

sense of time. Hours may seem to pass by in minutes or seconds can stretch far beyond the normal perceptions of clock time. When all of these dimensions of flow are in place, the experience is described as autotelic or rewarding in and of itself.

Peak Experience: Maslow (1968) introduced the peak experience concept to explain those moments when an individual experiences feelings of total unity, inner strength, and wholeness of being. It describes those moments of highest happiness and fulfillment, which are accompanied by loss of fears, inhibitions, and insecurities. He described this experience as an ecstatic, nonvoluntary moment of total integration and internal peace.

Privette & Bundrick (1991), add to the definition that it is fulfilling, significant and spiritual, but point out areas of their research that stand in contradiction to aspects of Maslow's definition of peak experience. Important differences worth mentioning follow:

Privette & Bundrick	Maslow
♦ Sense of unity of self.	♦ Loss of self.
♦ Characterized by intention.	♦ Nonmotivation.
♦ Self in clear process.	♦ Loss of self.

According to Ravizza (1984), the flow experience has great similarity to the peak experience except that, characteristically, flow is more voluntary in nature. Clearly the three experiences are very similar in some cases but distinctly different in others.

Peak Performance: This is a state of superior functioning whose characteristics are: clearly focused attention; lack of concern with outcome; effortless performance; perception of time slowing down; and a feeling of supreme confidence (Brewer, 1991). It is further described as the state of superior functioning that characterizes optimal sport performances resulting in personal bests and outstanding achievements (Jackson & Roberts, 1992).

These specific concepts are discussed in greater detail in the literature review.

Flow investigations using a variety of subjects participating in different activities, have been undertaken, while researchers of peak performance and peak experience have focused on the athlete in sport pursuits. Although minimal, this main body of information provides researchers with impressions from competitive athletes such as gymnasts (Ravizza, 1984), swimmers, track athletes, field athletes, divers, runners and tennis players (Brewer, et al 1991, Jackson & Roberts, 1992), skiers (Ravizza, 1984), golfers (Kimiecik & Stein,

1992), and skaters (Jackson, 1992). From the noncompetitive realm come study subjects such as rock climbers, artists, actors, sailors, realtors, people in every day jobs (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975, 1990). The professional modern dancer has been given little notice. The experiences of professional modern dancers in enhanced performance states have not been scrutinized; little empirical data exists in the literature to date. Csikszentmihalyi (1975, 1988) is one researcher who considers modern dancers' experiences in the flow state. His particular study consisted of a sample of 60 modern dancers who were tested with the Flow Questionnaire or Flow Q. This instrument consists of three quotations describing the flow experience based on original flow interviews (Csikszentmihalyi, 1988). Respondents were asked to read each of the three quotations and indicate if he or she had ever experienced anything similar. Respondents ranged in age from 18 - 44 years, and only two of the 60 were men. They fell into five groupings of: 2nd, 3rd, 4th, and 5th year students and teachers. Briefly, Csikszentmihalyi looked for the merger of vocation and the flow experience and found the incidence of flow increased in students as the level of experience increased. The dance instructors experienced the state of flow most frequently, deriving great

satisfaction from teaching the subject that inspires them most in life. One important aspect of Csikszentmihalyi's definition of flow seems to apply here. Flow is experienced when persons face tasks that are within their ability to perform (1975). Csikszentmihalyi focused specifically on the flow experience, which is an optimal mental state, and specifically on students and teachers. In his study, no professional performing modern dancers were questioned, and no mention was made of enhanced experiences while deeply immersed in a performance situation.

Purpose and Rationale

The purpose of this study is to investigate and document enhanced performance states as experienced by professional modern dancers. Much of the past research focuses on the athlete in competition. Athletic competition emphasizes the motor skill component of the sport: how fast, how high, how far, how many points are scored, and can you out perform your opponent. Professional modern dancers, with all of their intensive training and physical challenges, are surely considered athletes inasmuch as the virtuoso basketball player or figure skater is considered an artist. Each requires highly refined motor skills. Yet, the very nature of modern dance is far from the

competitive mode of sport. Modern dance focuses on aesthetic expression and creativity. That is, dance is first an expressive, performing *art* based on a highly active, physical discipline. The athlete, also a performer who is perceived as physically beautiful when playing her/his sport, plays to compete and competes to win. Herein lies the difference. The modern dancer's intent is not to get higher, run faster, or throw farther in order to compete, score or win. The highest leg extensions, the most revolutions while turning, or the greatest degree of elevation while jumping, are not the modern dancer's ultimate goal. These feats are certainly enviable technical skills. In fa ·t, they may enable the dancer to express the movement with greater range, increase her/his level of self esteem, and so expand one's confidence in their ability to perform. However, the modern dancer's goal is artistic communication as conceived through the direction of a choreographer's aesthetic vision. Ultimately the aim is to reveal the dance through the dancer, thus disclosing the performing artist as a most vulnerable creature. This fine difference makes the modern dancer unique from the athlete: instilling in the dancer the ability to convey feeling and mood through the body without words. Because of this important difference between the

competitive athlete and the performing dancer, more dance specific information needs to be explored. This new and rich information regarding the modern dancer's experiences of enhanced performance states will thereby contribute to the existing body of knowledge.

The Research Question

This investigation of professional modern dancers evolved from the question:

"What are enhanced performance states in modern dancers and how are they perceived?"

This inquiry is defined by the following statements:

1. The phenomena of enhanced performance states are experienced by the professional modern dancer.
2. Many circumstances including the physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional circumstances of the modern dancer may have an impact on when the enhanced performance states occur.
3. The qualities and characteristics of enhanced performance states as experienced by modern dancers are unique and may take on varied and similar descriptions as indicated in previous studies.

The purpose of this thesis is not to determine whether the experiences of modern dancers fall within the definitions of flow, peak experience, or peak performance. Rather, these definitions and the available

studies concerning enhanced performance states, provide a varied background and a point of reference with which to compare similarities. The process of discovery can be further enabled through the comparison of perceived differences between the experiences of modern dancers in enhanced performance states and the existing definitions and research. Therefore, the sub-questions that governed this study are:

- What conditions does the dancer suggest are in place ***when*** this experience occurs?
- In what setting or ***where*** does this state occur?
- ***What*** are the characteristics of this enhanced state?
- ***How*** is it experienced and described?
- ***What contingencies*** do the dancers claim to be significant before and after the experience?
- Is there a similarity to other states as described by researchers in sport?

These sub-questions form the basis for categories in the analysis of the data.

Format of the Thesis

This thesis shall be presented in the following format: Chapter Two provides an overview of the literature on Peak Experience, Peak Performance, and Flow including other documented instances by dancers. Chapter Three describes the methods and design used as well as the ethical considerations for the study. Chapter Four presents the findings of the study as they emerged from the data collection. Chapter Five contains a discussion of the findings and how they relate to the review of literature outlined in Chapter Two. A summary of the study and recommendations for future research are presented in Chapter Six.

II. LITERATURE

Ravizza attempts to define the characteristics of peak experience in sport and reports that: "....the quality of peak experiences are temporary, non-voluntary, and unique. Thus, the experience never produces a lasting enhanced mental state and no known available method can pinpoint its occurrence." (1984, p. 455) Many researchers have attempted to identify enhanced performance states and flow experiences in a variety of ways. Csikszentmihalyi, a leading investigator in the flow experience, states that by the early seventies, the research in this area "....was based on rather restricted laboratory settings.... (researchers) were inducing intrinsically motivated performance in laboratories....not concerned about how the person so motivated was feeling....My first concern was about the quality of subjective experience...." (Optimal Experience, 1988, p.7) His first studies, and those of other researchers, involved interviews and questionnaires, and both qualitative and quantitative methods were employed. This type of phenomenon is unique to the individual but when viewed rationally, can lose substance and depth. By trying to make each aspect of the experience fit into a category, it is difficult to maintain the essential nature of the dancer's experience. Descriptions of personal accounts and feelings contain rich information. Jackson

(1992) grapples with this problem in her statement, "Experience as a subject of psychological inquiry is often relegated to secondary importance due to an emphasis on understanding overt behavior." (p. 162) In addition, Privette & Bundrick (1991) point out that, "....experience is more comprehensive than behavior, and less global than personality." (p. 170) In other words, by observing the dancer's behavior, only the individual's personality may be conceivable. However, getting at the heart of the dancer's experience may be more inclusive and more far reaching. This kind of phenomenon requires ascertaining a dancer's cognition and emotions in order to capture these sometimes elusive thoughts and feelings.

Daniel Nagrin, in his book, "How to Dance Forever; Surviving Against the Odds" (1988, p. 185) attempts to profile those who are drawn to dance as a life work and in so doing, makes a clear reference to enhanced performance experiences as defined by researchers such as Ravizza. Daniel Nagrin' provides a vivid description of the dancer's higher state of consciousness:

> *Before anything, we are a people who regularly have an almost mystical experience. It comes unbidden. It can never be called up on demand. We are dancing, in class, rehearsal, performance. It usually happens when the body is hot and flowing, and not infrequently, deep in the heart of fatigue. We are dancing and there*

is a shift. We never notice when it happens. We no longer have any skin. The floor becomes pliable, the music is coming from everywhere at once. It is being made in our body. The walls dissolve. There are no walls. We have no limits. We can do anything. We are a universe where everything in us and outside us is us and all of us are whirling about in the dance. We are in the middle of a multicolored soup and our dancing, our body, is stirring it all up. We never notice when it begins, and only when it ends can we look back and know that it has happened for while it is happening we are as happy as we can ever be, and the beauty of it all is that while it is happening we are too busy to know we are happy. Briefly, it's called a high.

Sometimes weeks go by. Even months, without this exquisite high. We go on because we know that having happened, it can happen again. If it ever stops happening for a very long time, our survival as a dancer is at stake. Without it, why dance? Without it, dancing is just a job and dancing is too hard, too risky and often too unrewarding to be just a job. So dancers are people who get high on movement. It may very well be the most profound reason we dance.

Mr. Nagrin's descriptive passage contains those qualities mentioned as inherent to peak experience: nonvoluntary, mystical, temporary, unique. He infers that he, as well as other dancers, experience these sensations. Ravizza (1984) states that "Peak experiences during an athlete's career are relatively rare but their intensity acts as a standard, or qualitative reference point, for subjectively evaluating

future performance." (p. 455) It is a rare personal moment that remains etched in the dancer's consciousness and may become the performance standard to which all other performances are compared.

An autobiography, written by dancer/choreographer Paul Taylor, "Private Domain" (1987), contains a description of one of his performances that remains a compelling memory years later. Following is an excerpt of his incomparable experience while dancing with the great Martha Graham, in *Clytemnestra.* This particular performance took place in 1958, when Paul was 28 years old and had been dancing with Martha since 1952:

> *Inside, at a million m.p.h. or more, corpuscles are zipping around and filling me with a sensation of great speed. Otherwise, I'm experiencing a feeling of superslow ooziness. This of course has little to do with actual rates of speed but is because of something that, for lack of a better term, I'll call the dancer's clock. Focus or concentration makes time different for when you dance and when you don't. No ordinary timepiece, like a drug, this clock stretches stage seconds, implanting eons in between--also compresses performing years into an outrageously short span. So I'm both speeding and oozing at once, scooting through space, slithering*

through time, eating it up and savoring each swallow. A flick of the foot and I'm airborne.

Bright stagelight is coming from all angles. Clinically. Like under a microscope, or on a vast, borderless desert. Basking there. Adding to the hot light, internal rays are traveling out through each of my pores.

Besides the music, such sounds as street traffic, murmuring from the wings, and burbling from the plumbing are magnified to a high pitch. Lint on a drape, the flavor of sweat, the odor of a stagehands's ground-out cigar are noticeably present. Hearing, sight, taste, touch, scent have become paranormal. Present also is a sixth sense -- let's call it will power. I can will myself into midair, hang there forever. By means of another, even more mysterious power, I'm able to control what the audience sees, can direct their eyes to any particular part of my body: left shoulder...my right elbow...both bunions at the same time. Anywhere.... (pp. 85 - 86)

Mr. Taylor refers to altered states of time, and describes all of his senses as intensified: light and heat, magnified and selective sounds, and a "paranormal sixth sense" that empowers. This correlates to Ravizza's (1984) explanation of altered perceptions of time, space and the quality of experience.

Several studies in sport deal with the concepts of flow, peak performance, and peak experience. The literature available describes experiences bearing much similarity to the dancer's "high." Although small in number, these investigations recall enhanced performance states as experienced by a number of different athletes. By substituting the word **'dancer'** for the athlete written about, e.g., golfer, skater, gymnast, the documented experiences paralleled those described by Daniel Nagrin and Paul Taylor. Following is an example of an optimal skating experience taken from Jackson (1992):

> *The focus was so narrow because my partner was in the same focus, and it was just she and I skating (dancing).....Everything else goes away, it almost happens in slow motion -- even though you're doing things at the correct time with the music and every thing. Nothing else matters, it's just such an eerie feeling.*

And:

> *It was just one of those programs that clicked. I mean everything went right, everything felt good....it's just such a rush, like you feel it could go on and on and on, like you don't have to think, it's like you're on automatic pilot, so you don't have any thoughts. You hear the music but you're not aware that you're hearing it because it's part of it all.*

These skaters performed as one with each other and the music without discerning. Their reports of altered perceptions of time are congruent with Nagrin's and Taylor's accounts.

A football player states that in a moment, "Things were under control; my body could do anything I wanted" (Ravizza,1984). As with Paul Taylor and his powerful "sixth sense", this football player described being in complete control of self and the environment, which illustrates an aspect of peak experience and flow. Csikszentmihalyi (1975) asserts that flow seems to occur only when persons face tasks that are within their ability to perform. This is why flow experiences occur most often in activities that have clearly established rules for action, such as rituals, games, or participatory art forms like the dance. A person in flow is in control of his/her actions and of the environment (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975). Joy is a component of both peak experience and flow. It can be highlighted with a sense of fulfillment and completeness (Privette, 1982). A downhill skier gives a description of this "joy":

> *I felt like I was radiating in every direction, not with pressure but with joy....I was totally filled up with joy like a helium balloon, and it was fantastic (Ravizza 1975).*

Murphy & White (1978) have compiled accounts of athletes who experience altered perceptions and extraordinary experiences. Many of these accounts deal with an altered sense of time: slowing down or speeding up and sometimes stopping. Some recall being altered in size, having an out of body experience or watching the performance while performing. In only one case however, is a dancer mentioned:

Dancer Jacques d'Amboise describes a sense of detachment in the supreme moments when he feels in command, that he can do anything with his body:

> *When you're dancing like that, you seem to be removed. You can enjoy yourself doing it and watch yourself doing it at the same time.* (Murphy & White, 1978)

Further, Murphy & White (1978) compared some of these extraordinary events, or altered states of consciousness in athletes to mystical phenomena, and in particular, ecstasy. They say ecstasy is an "intense, overpowering joy" which seems literally to lift those who have the experience out of themselves. According to Marghanita Laski who has studied the experience of ecstasy (1961), movement is one of the conditions that triggers the state of ecstasy. In her book, Dance and Stress, (1988) Judith Lynne Hanna describes altered states of consciousness as creating "the feeling of a qualitative shift in

thinking, disturbance in the time sense, loss of control, change in body image, perceptual distortion, change in meaning, sense of the ineffable, feeling of rejuvenation, and hypersuggestibility." She then counters this with the aspects of flow, that have a feeling of creative accomplishment and heightened functions. Flow elements include a centering of attention, loss of self-consciousness, **sense of control**, and **the joy of taking action** (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975). Religious ecstasy, on the other hand, involves a sense of shifting boundaries of time and consciousness. Rapid motion in dance, such as spinning and turning used in trance dance, is especially intoxicating and said to alter the state of consciousness resulting in a state of bliss and elation. It appears that ecstasy shares aspects of flow, peak experience, and peak performance. Each one is implicated in altering the ordinary state of consciousness, thus placing it within the realm of ASC. **However, an individual in ecstasy or trance dance is not in conscious control. Moreover, it is typically unconscious with a characteristic loss of control.** This thesis does not attempt to relate the enhanced performance experiences of professional modern dancers to ecstasy and trance dancing. It intends to demonstrate that these modern dancers, although in altered states of consciousness,

are empowered by their experiences and have reached a level of performance where conscious control is so ingrained that it becomes automatic.

III. METHOD

This study required a form of investigation that would capture the dancer's extraordinary, transcendent feelings and emotions. Interviewing is generally considered to be the best method for pursuing a subject in-depth, operating in a discovery mode, and creating interaction with an individual (Henderson, 1991). Interviews provided an in-depth look at the dancers' experiences by allowing them to describe specific details about how they thought, felt, and perceived themselves before, during, and after an experience (Jackson, 1992). Accordingly, one-on-one interviews employing both structured and open-ended questions with this select group of professional modern dancers provided rich and deep information.

Meaning is the most important outcome of any strategy related to data interpretation. When the context and the meaning of their experiences are closely associated, this is referred to as **thick description** (Henderson, 1991). According to Geertz (1973), who credits the original phrase to Gilbert Ryle, *thick description* is a form of ethnography; a way to bring us into touch with strangers and what is being said. The content and interpretation of what is being said takes us to the heart of enhanced dance performance experiences. The design of thick description empathizes, describes, judges, compares,

portrays, evokes images, and creates a sense of having been there (Guba and Lincoln,1981).

Theoretical Sensitivity

Strauss and Corbin (1990) refer to *theoretical sensitivity* as a personal quality of the researcher that indicates an awareness of the subtleties in meaning of data. The sources for theoretical sensitivity can be varied. *Literature* is one. It could come from a familiarity with specific readings on theory or background information that sensitizes one to the phenomenon studied. *Professional* and *personal experiences* are further sources if the researcher is fortunate enough to have had this experience (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Familiarity with the profession of modern dance, gives me an advantage in the role of researcher. I speak the same "dance language"; represent the same age group; and come from the same area of dance. I have also experienced enhanced performance states while dancing in professional performance situations. Due to this personal and professional sensitivity, a greater degree of trust was established and a more relaxed setting in which to conduct the interviews was created. Thus, the likelihood of achieving better results was increased.

Grounded Theory

Grounded theory is a qualitative research approach that was collaboratively developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967). Its systematic techniques and procedures of analysis enable the researcher to develop a substantive theory that meets the criteria for doing "good" science (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Creativity is also an important element. Qualitative approaches use descriptions to interpret experiences, focusing on explanation, pattern development, and the development of grounded theory by using depth of analysis and detail (Henderson, 1991). The main purpose in using a grounded theory method is to develop theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). The underlying approach to qualitative research is the assumption that all the concepts pertaining to a given phenomenon have not yet been identified. This is certainly true in the professional modern dance population. This qualitative approach to the study of enhanced performance states resulted in discovery, but could also result in theory confirmation (Henderson, 1991).

The Subjects, Delimitations and Definitions

The selection criteria for subjects was established to be:

A. Only professional modern dancers will be interviewed. A **professional modern dancer** is defined herein as:

- A modern dancer who has trained consistently with recognized teachers in the field.
- This training will have been for a period of not less than 5 years, and may be prior to or concurrent with professional experience. Professional standards imply that a daily class, in addition to a regular rehearsal schedule, is maintained. (A regular dance class usually lasts from 1 hour and 30 minutes to 2 hours in duration and is customarily taken approximately 5 - 6 days a week).

B. Participants must have a minimum of 10 years of experience as a professional dancer. (Understandably, a more mature dancer is eligible.)

- According to Ravizza (1984), certain conditions must be in place before the athlete (dancer) can experience a peak moment. The athlete must achieve a mastery of basic skills. *"This prerequisite is met when the athlete (dancer) need no*

longer think about technical elements of skill execution." Likewise, Csikszentmihalyi (1975) states that, *"Flow seems to occur when persons face tasks that are within their ability to perform."*

C. A dancer who has performed publicly in various proscenium theatres, and alternative venues.

D. A dancer who has maintained that their main profession is (was) that of performing dancer (as opposed to teacher or choreographer only).

E. A dancer who has performed on a regular basis ("regular" may be variable), with a particular company or in a series of "pick-up" performances, with a minimum accumulation of approximately 3 - 4 scheduled performance runs per year, either/or home based seasons, tours or in combination.

Procedure

Qualified subjects were located through personal professional contacts. Since my own background in the dance world spans 20 years and encompasses major cities such as New York and Philadelphia, personal contacts and referrals were readily accessible.

Six dancers were interviewed; three women and three men. Table 1, using the information taken from the demographic forms, illustrates the characteristics of the sample used. Prior to the interview, each dancer was initially contacted by telephone and given a brief orientation on the research proposed.

Table 1. Background characteristics of the professional modern dancer sample

BACKGROUND CHARACTERISTICS					
DANCER	**Age started dancing**	**Years danced professionally**	**Years Danced when 1st experience occurred**	**Predominant modern dance styles**	**Other influences and styles**
Uma	12	13	6	Nikolais-Louis	Theatre, Literature, Mia Slavenska, Dunham
Dana	5	23	6	Nikolais-Louis Limón	Gamson, Monk, Classical voice training
Raven	21	10	8	Limón, Falco, Muller	Theatre, Gymnastics, Swimming
Max	12	15	7	Limón, Falco, Muller	Ballet, Tap, Ethnic
Philip	20	15	5	Graham, Taylor, Wagoner	Ballet, Pilobolus, Sports
Darius	17	35	6	Farnsworth, O'Donnell, Taylor	Art, Music, Jazz

All interviews were conducted at a site chosen by the interviewee in order to provide a relaxed, non-threatening and comfortable environment conducive to the interview. Such places consisted of their own homes, studios or private offices.

Ethical Considerations

To ensure the ethical adequacy of this study, approval was obtained from the ethics review committee of the Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation, University of Alberta. Informed consent and demographic forms were given to each dancer prior to the interview and contained the following: (*See appendices* A *and* B)

- Statements related to anonymity and confidentiality
- An unambiguous statement allowing that the participant may decline to answer questions and how said participant may withdraw without consequence
- A place for the signatures of participant and the investigator
- A demographic data form including a request to briefly describe their professional background
- Request for permission to audio-tape the interview

A clause that allowed any segment of the interview to be omitted should it cause discomfort to the interviewee.

Data Collection

The key to successful interviewing is to get people to talk (Henderson, 1992). Questions may be asked in the time frame of past, present, or future and may explore issues of experience/behavior, opinions/values, feelings (emotional responses), knowledge/facts, senses (what was seen, heard, touched), or background demographics.

The interview questions were structured around the central research question, and sub-questions (p. 12), and further adapted from the available literature to dance specifically. A pilot study preceded this thesis which tested the use and suitability of these questions. The questions were designed to be open-ended, neutral, and intended to be a guide for the interview, thereby allowing for individual response. Furthermore, these questions were designed to be direct and personal. Following is the guide list of questions:

1. **Can you recall from your past dancing an enhanced performance experience? What was it like?**

2. **What words could you use to describe it?**
3. **What did it feel like?**
4. **Were your sensory perceptions affected?**
5. **How was this different from your regular level of performance?**
6. **Describe your awareness of others at this time? Of your surroundings? Of the audience?**

Peripheral or probing questions such as:

"Tell me more about that." and *"What other words could you use to describe that?"*

were used openly to further deepen their descriptions. Questions were redirected so that all of the categories of inquiry could be saturated.

Data analysis and interpretation

The circular nature of grounded theory suggests three basic steps in the analysis (Glaser, 1978):

a) Coding the data

b) Classifying the data into categorical schemes or domains

c) Discovering the core categories

What emerges eventually becomes integrated into theory when an audit trail is used to interface themes or categories with existing

literature. By leaving an audit trail, describing how conclusions were obtained, another person ought to be able to follow that trail and obtain the same conclusions (Henderson, 1991).

Interpretation involves attaching meaning and significance to the data, examining the relationships among the data acquired from the modern dancers' interviews and focusing on the emergent ideas (Henderson, 1991). In grounded theory this is accomplished through the development of categories or domains in terms of their properties and dimensions, a process called *open coding* (Strauss and Glaser, 1990). Properties are the characteristics or attributes of a category, and dimensions represent locations of a property along a continuum.

The statements that guide the initial research question (Chapt. 1, pg. 11) provide the framework for the categories of analysis. For example, prior conditions in the dancer's life may have an impact on ***when*** the state occurs. The ***when*** of the occurrence becomes a category and the circumstances, characteristics and attributes of the ***when*** comprise the properties and dimensions. ***What*** is experienced and ***how*** it is experienced, focus on the actual descriptions of the state and the experience of being while in the state. ***What*** and ***how***

make up yet another category with domains, their own sets of characteristics and attributes or dimensions and properties.

Sorting out the categories, domains, properties and dimensions illustrates the relationships that one holds for the other. Figuratively speaking, it is like fitting the pieces of a puzzle together and is referred to as *axial coding* (Strauss & Glaser, 1990). The purpose of axial coding is to verify relationships between a category and its sub-categories and to look for variation in the properties through their dimensions (Strauss & Glaser, 1990).

Content Analysis and Triangulation

Dancers' quotations, drawn directly from transcripts of each interview, become the unit of analysis. These transcripts were verbatim descriptions of the taped personal interviews which lasted between 60 and 180 minutes each.

The transcribed interviews were content analyzed first looking for raw data themes identified from specific dancer quotes or paraphrased quotes and then organized into interpretable and meaningful themes. This process of *content analysis* is used in analyzing documents, records, transcribed conversations, letters, or anything in contextual form (Henderson, 1991). It can be either

inductive or deductive. The inductive form is used here to reveal emerging themes and patterns from the data rather than using a predetermined code (Henderson, 1991).

Validity and Reliability

Triangulation is one way to check the validity of the research. Data comparison is among the different approaches that can be taken in relation to triangulation. Comparing the data culled from my interviews with dancers to the research of others, becomes a way to check the consistency of data sources. This form of data comparison can give more valid and reliable information.

Patton (1990), discusses another element in relation to establishing reliability and credibility and that is the credibility of the researcher. Providing information about the investigator is recommended because the investigator is the instrument in qualitative inquiry. As the investigator in this project, I have a background knowledge of philosophical and methodological issues related to qualitative research and a belief in, or appreciation for this type of inquiry. This belief is important because it underlies what is either accepted or not accepted as credible evidence.

The issue of validity and reliability was addressed in other ways as well. During the interview, effort was made to verify the data by asking the dancers about the same content in different ways; in other words asking the same question differently. This type of concurrent validation enhanced the accuracy of data collection. Additionally, as the interviews were each transcribed, copies were submitted to the respective dancers to read through, correct or confirm and validate in order to minimize researcher bias or distortion.

Limitations

The theory may be limited in its ability to generalize by a number of factors. First, only professional modern dancers were interviewed. Perhaps dancers from other disciplines such as ballet or jazz may provide differing data as might amateur or semi-professional dancers. All of the dance subjects were over 35 years of age at the time of the interview. Therefore, this study does not reflect the possible occurrence of enhanced performance states in younger dancers. Finally, all dancers interviewed relied on recall of their experiences whether it was weeks, months, or years following the occurrence. No

known method has been devised that could document the existence of an enhanced performance state while it is occurring without intruding on and interfering with the individual's experience (Kimiecik & Stein, 1992).

IV. FINDINGS

The results of the research are presented in this chapter. The purpose of the research was to investigate the experiences of modern dancers in enhanced performance states, describe their qualities and characteristics, and compare these to some of the existing research on enhanced performance states in athletes for similarities. A greater understanding of the states as dancers experience them and the intrinsic reward experienced therein, was sought. **When, where** and **how** these states were experienced, and **what** was perceived is significant to the information. The interviews with the dancers provided rich textual descriptions of their experiences, which were then analyzed and coded into categories and domains. These categories and domains developed from the emergence of properties and dimensions embodied in the characteristics and descriptions of the dancers experiences. A fourth category developed through the analysis. The category **after** emerged as a post experience reflection and included the dancers' personal contingency theories. Direct quotations from the interviews have been used to illustrate and support the findings.

The Subjects: Profiles of the Dancers

In total, six dancers were interviewed; three women and three men. The dancers are briefly profiled here in order to give dimension and color to the subsequent interview portions. As stated previously, the dancers' real names have not been used.

Uma grew up in the mid-western United States and started her dance training at the age of 12. From this point on, she studied many dance forms (ballet, modern, and jazz). She also cited theatre, music, and literature as other strong influences. She received a graduate degree in dance from UCLA, and shortly after graduation, began her professional career in New York City, dancing with a major modern dance company. She reported three separate enhanced performance experiences that occurred during this professional association of 13 years.

Dana was raised in the greater New York City area, and began dance training by the age of 5. At the age of 17, she was dancing professionally. Over the course of 23 years, she danced with three internationally acclaimed modern dance choreographers and established and directed her own company of 10 years. In addition to dancing, choreographing, and teaching, she is an accomplished

classical singer and holds an undergraduate degree. She related two enhanced performance experiences in dance.

Raven came to the profession of dance later in life, although her younger years in the mid-western United States were involved with gymnastics and competitive swimming. At the age of 21, in New York City, while acquiring a BA at Barnard, she began modern dance training. Within a few short years she was dancing professionally with two major modern dance companies in New York City. Another major influence for Raven is theatre in which she also participated on a professional level. She related two enhanced performance experiences.

Max grew up in the greater New York City area. He began tap dancing at age 12, and later attended the High School of Performing Arts in New York receiving a respectable background in modern, ballet, east Indian and Spanish dance. While still in high school, he was dancing with several professional companies. Over the course of 15 years, Max danced with four nationally and internationally acclaimed modern dance companies, and completed an undergraduate degree. As well, he choreographed and directed his own modern dance company. Other professional incarnations include

television direction. He shared two enhanced performance experiences in dance.

Philip came from the inner city of Baltimore and attended university as a physical education major before encountering modern dance at the age of 20. Through encouragement from instructors, he continued and received his undergraduate degree in dance from the North Carolina School of the Arts. Thereafter, he joined a major modern dance group and performed internationally. Since then, he formed his own company for whom he currently choreographs and directs. In addition, he is a freelance choreographer for other major companies. He is based in New York and has danced professionally for 20 years. He refers to two of his enhanced performance dance experiences.

Darius grew up in San Francisco and discovered dance at the age of 17 while in undergraduate school. He was quickly assimilated into a major New York company where he danced for 12 years and later with a major Canadian dance company. Subsequently, he formed his own modern dance company in Toronto in which he dances, choreographs and directs. His professional career spans over 30 years. Other influences he reported include art and music.

Category I: When - Domains of Responding: Affect on When the Enhanced Performance State Occurs

The interviews disclosed that all of the dancers experienced certain events or circumstances prior to their performance that could have supported the onset of an enhanced performance state. All six of the dancers talked about their behavioral or personal modes of responding when the experiences occurred. These modes of responding, belonging to the category of **when**, have been sorted into domains, and defined as follows:

1. **Physical:** Any circumstance of a physically related nature that may have had an impact on *when* the dancer had an enhanced performance experience.
2. **Mental:** Any factors pertaining to mental effect or mental properties of the dancer *when* the enhanced performance experience occurred.
3. **Spiritual:** Any beliefs, feelings or convictions that were present *when* the enhanced performance experience occurred.
4. **Emotional:** Any variation in mood, disposition or frame of mind *when* the enhanced performance experience occurred.

Category: When - Domain: Physical

The dancers' physical circumstances prior to the enhanced performance state, suggest that certain physical conditions enabled or influenced when the state occurred. Fatigue and/or relaxation were considered contributing factors by the dancers.

Uma recalls an exhausting rehearsal situation that led to an enhanced performance state:

> We had been rehearsing all day and we were all tired....I went through this solo and nothing went wrong!....Maybe I was relaxed enough because it was not a performance (situation). I was just going to do this run through.

Max had been working in Mobile, Alabama for one month as an artist in residence. In order to make an out of town scheduled company performance, Max left Mobile at 6 AM. First he traveled by jet, then by small plane and finally by automobile to arrive barely in time to perform at 8:00 PM on stage in a small town in New Hampshire:

Max:

> I was tired but I felt great and I was thrilled to get out of Mobile.

Raven's comment on prior physical factors dealt with the importance of ease and comfort in the dance:

> ....when the dancing had become comfortable for me.....I think that is inherent in an experience.

Darius felt that tiredness allowed him to let go:

> It tends to happen more on the days you are tired. You have nothing you can hold onto....I was relaxed....I was just so relaxed.

All six of the dancers believed that their years of experience on the performing stage enabled the occurrence of the enhanced state and that a dance which was well rehearsed yet especially challenging was vitally important.

Uma:

> When you get so involved in the sheer physicality of it....a lot of that stuff was second nature. After all those years of performing....That solo was exciting and devilishly difficult....it had been rehearsed a lot. When I got as comfortable with that piece on stage as I was off stage, then I performed my best.

Dana:

> ....a piece that I performed many times before....physically well honed, very in control and what we say, on top of the movement.

Raven spoke of her technical and performance ability at the time of an enhanced performance state:

> (I) was experienced as a dancer....a well accomplished performer. Dancing had become more about finesse....There was no pain involved. (I) had performed these dances a lot. I think you have to be in a dance that demands your utmost, which both dances did.

Max's comments were in accordance:

> It was probably the hardest (dance)....but it didn't seem to matter....you couldn't really dance well until you had done the (dance) enough times....(when you are) professionally accomplished.

Philip:

> It is the pay off for all those years of hard work and rehearsal, the class stuff....all of your training, all your years of experience pay off basically.

And **Darius** :

> You had to perform a lot. His (the choreographer's) works were always so physical. Experience helped it.

Individually, each dancer agreed that experience in years and the frequency of specific performances enabled the conditions for enhanced performance states. **Max** expanded this idea further stating that:

> I didn't think you could dance well in class. The best class you could ever have, you weren't dancing. You were learning to dance, because the combinations were new, there were people in your way, you were waiting your turn, the teacher was interrupting for corrections, and all of this stuff.....Even in rehearsal, you couldn't really dance well until you had learned the dance, done the dance enough times.....It all had to be under your belt, and then you could dance....

Under the physical domain, the following dimensions and properties emerged as important or even built-in factors that determined when the dancer experienced an enhanced performance state:

- Fatigue
- A relaxed state
- Years of experience
- Frequency of performing the specific dance
- A matched challenge of the dancer's individual technical ability to the difficulty level of the dance
- No pain

Category: When - Domain: Mental

The dancers wanted to be mentally engaged and challenged in the same way that their physical side had been. The dance had to contain aspects that were stimulating and exciting, or retain a connection that was dramatic or character based. Additionally a high degree of respect[1] for the piece was an essential condition. If these factors were addressed within the dance, then it allowed them to go into the

[1] A dancer is sometimes required to perform dance works that are personally or artistically incompatible. In such an instance, dancing can be less engaging or enjoyable. Therefore, it is difficult to maintain a high level of regard or respect for the choreography.

performance without distraction, feeling mentally engaged and personally integrated.

Uma believed her enhanced performance experiences depended entirely on the dance work she was doing:

> I think it has to be something that really captures what you're doing, dancing at that point has to really capture your imagination or your heart.....When something is new, exciting and fun to do.
>
> Or
>
> When I find a dramatic hook that helps me maintain an image, I could get an inner drama going.....I liked the work I was in.

Dana experienced an enhanced performance state when she felt stimulated by an aspect of the dance:

> I was very much into the person or the character I was trying to convey.....actual memories of the people (the dance was based on) came to me.

Raven needed to like the work, trust it, and know it was good:

> When you know the dances are good, you like what you are doing, and there is a total trust. You know you could let go....(It) is sheer fun and fun to do. You don't have to fight the dance.

In his enhanced performance experiences, **Philip** liked and trusted the dance and the people with whom he danced. He felt the difficulty element disappeared:

When we were tuned into each other (trusting), we knew the work so well.

When certain prerequisites were met, such as respect and trust for the dance work and the other dancers, the dancer's mental energy merged with the dance enabling integration of the two without distraction. **Uma** said it this way:

Your head is not a whole lot involved when it happens....Your (mental noise) gets out of the way.

Dana recalled her experience where:

There was no intellectualizing about what to do. I wasn't thinking about anything actual or intellectual.

Max:

In this case, I arrived somewhat distracted from the performance focus. I was not thinking about dancing well and actually thought I would perform at a sub par level.

Philip:

(When you are performing) it is very clear in your mind how things had to be (but) you don't really think about it.

Darius:

There just must not be a lot of thinking (when you perform in this state)....you weren't worried.

Again, Max comments on this circumstance further:

(When this) peak moment (occurs), it sort of opens up into a deeper level of memory.

Properties of mental consequence emerged as key elements that enabled the dancer to experience an enhanced performance state. The dancers indicated a dance needed to meet certain requirements in order for an enhanced performance state to occur. The mental properties were:

- Mentally stimulating
- Fun/exciting
- An appreciation, respect and trust in the dance work
- No mental distraction in the form of technical and choreographic dance elements

Additionally, if the dance is dramatic or character based, then this point also emerges as a potential requisite:

- A dramatic or character connection

Category: When - Domain: Emotional

Emotions are ever present in all of us, and intensify under pressure. This is certainly true for the dancer/performer who often sacrifices time, friends and family in order to dedicate all of their energy to the

dance effort. Particularly on the day of a performance, emotions magnify. Nervousness and anxiety[2] are common occurrences for stage performers and can have either an adverse or favorable affect on the dancer. Whatever prior emotional state the dancer was in could have influenced the dance performance in some manner.

All of the dancers spoke of being nervous at different times in their career, yet four of the six dancers did not allude to being nervous preceding their enhanced performance experiences. In fact they stated the opposite; a relaxed state was encountered. However, **Uma** and **Darius** talked about going through a stage of nervousness before reaching that relaxed state.

Uma:

> I worked with a lot of performance anxiety. I could work up a terrific state of nerves....keyed up.

Darius:

> (It came) out of nervousness and into a relaxed state.

Both dancers state that they "went through it", or alleviated the nervousness by other methods; Uma relied on entreaty (from the Spiritual domain) and Darius discovered ways of letting go (other circumstances such as fatigue and relying on experience from the

---

[2] The dancers refer to anxiety here in layman's terms; e.g. worry, uneasiness, agitation. Anxiety as defined in the clinical sense is not inferred here.

Physical domain). Neither one was nervous during the actual enhanced performance experience.

Anxiety, on the other hand, was not suggested as being significantly related to issues of performance itself. Factors in the dancer's personal life caused more feelings of anxiety than did performance issues.

Uma:

> I was going through fear of and indecision anxiety about leaving the company.

Dana:

> (I was) anxious over my personal relationships; the man I was seeing, my husband, and my friend who was dying of AIDS.

Philip:

> I was in a bad way from having argued with a girlfriend prior to the performance.

For the others, performance nervousness and non-performance related personal anxieties were not present before these particular performances. However, they did report that pre-performance mood could have been affected by sadness or joy in their lives:

Dana:

> (I felt) sadness at the loss of a friend.

On another occasion **Dana** also stated:

> I was so moved emotionally by observing the other dancers in my dance, that it sort of pushed me over the edge.

Raven:

> (When) I was excited about where and what I was performing..... I was in a good mood emotionally.

Max:

> I had been feeling lonely and in a bad mood prior....(dancing in) my own (choreographic) work was emotionally important and I was now happy to be with my peers. I felt I was encompassed: in my dance, with my friends I loved, and I enjoyed dancing this dance.

Philip:

> I was emotionally in a negative frame of mind at the time of the performance.

The day of a performance is treated differently from other days by all dancers. Everything done on the day of performance is usually done with the focus on that specific performance. Care is taken to rest and eat properly. Dancers time their meals so that digestion does not impede physical functioning but rather provides quality food energy and optimally improves the dancer's chances of the best possible performance. Additional attention to any physical concerns such as minor injuries also takes precedence, allowing extra time in the

schedule for preparation and warm-up. Emotionally the dancer is functioning in an altered mode which is different from an average day.

The pattern appearing within this category seems to be distinct in some way from the usual routine resulting in the presence of a heightened emotional state when the dancer has an experience. No one reported an ordinary day. The dancers interviews showed that the following emotional conditions were evident before an enhanced performance experience:

- Feelings of nervousness
- Feelings of anxiety
- Feelings of unhappiness
- Feelings of elation

Category: When - Domain: Spiritual

This domain is based on feelings or insights the dancers experienced when going into the enhanced performance state. These feelings or insights suggest a comparison to instinctive feelings or precognition that the dancer's performance was going to be very different, unusual and unique. Two dancers used comparisons that referred to established spiritual thought. Other used words like "spirit" "spiritual"

and "divine". However, this sample of dancers did not claim to have conventional religious beliefs. **Uma** spoke openly about her past spiritual associations in reference to her dancing. Her first experiences came at a time in her life when she pursued Eastern spiritual thought. She stated:

> ....(when) I was very much into seeing my spiritual teacher....I was into my spiritual stuff....I had a feeling that this was going to be one of those (performances)....that unknown something....what exactly focuses it?

Dana also said:

> I had a feeling: I knew that nothing was going to go wrong.

Darius also attributed an enhanced dance moment to:

> (When) the spirit takes you.

Only **Uma** suggested a silent or spoken entreaty:

> I said to myself, 'I can't do this damn dance. You do it.' Meaning God or whatever; meaning the divine or higher self.

Philip and **Uma** both compared their enhanced performance moments to a Zen approach:

> **P:** I think it was like a Zen approach to what we were doing.

> **U:** (The moment comes) when you are so at one with what you are doing .... like Zen.

The spiritual domain revealed properties and dimensions that impacted on the dancers' experiences. Although this aspect of the category of *when* figures into the modern dancer's experience in enhanced performance states, it is not a requisite and is highly individual. The properties and dimensions emerged from the spiritual domain include:

- Feelings of premonition
- A spiritual belief that something other than the self, influences performance
- Entreaty to a higher power
- A comparison to a Zen approach

Table 2. Category I: When - Domains: Modes of Responding

Category I: When Domains: Modes of Responding (Conditions present in the dancers' lives prior to their enhanced performance experiences that may affect when)			
1. Domain: Physical	***2. Domain: Mental***	***3. Domain: Emotional***	***4. Domain: Spiritual***
Fatigue	Mentally stimulating	Feelings of nervousness	Feelings of premonition
A relaxed state	Fun/exciting	Feelings of anxiety	A spiritual belief that something other than the self, influences performance
Years of experience	An appreciation, respect and trust in the dance work	Feelings of unhappiness	Entreaty to a higher power
Frequency of performing the specific dance	No mental distraction in the form of technical and choreographic dance elements	Feelings of elation	A comparison to a Zen approach
A matched challenge of the dancer's individual technical ability to the difficulty level of the dance.	A dramatic or character connection		

Where the Enhanced Performance State Occurs: Affect of Setting on Occurrence

Dance performances in a traditional setting usually take place on a proscenium stage with full lights, wings and theatrical curtains. This results in the ability to control the environment. In the performance of modern dance, the traditional setting is not always the rule: site specific performances often occur. They frequently incorporate the naturally occurring environment or are on a stage built specially for the outdoors. In this regard, *where* refers to the locale.

The dancers interviewed also referred to *where,* as the place in which the dancer is positioned within the context of the group or the overall dance work. This *where* setting in relation to the dancer on stage, might influence the occurrence of an enhanced performing state. For example, the dancer may be a featured soloist within a larger work with other dancers in the background, or performing solo independent of other dancers on the stage or in the performing space. Duets, or other group configurations (trios, quartets, and so on) may also figure into the *where* of the occurrence.

All six of the dancers commented on where they were when their enhanced performance state occurred. **Locale** and **specific type of performance configuration** emerged as domains within this category.

Category: Where - Domain: Locale

Where the dancers experienced their enhanced performance states varied. They ranged from rehearsal situations to proscenium stage to outdoor performances. From this group of dancers, only **Uma** shared a rehearsal experience:

> We had been rehearsing all day (in the studio)....

All of the dancers including Uma had experiences of an enhanced performance nature on an indoor proscenium stage.

Uma:

> That one in Taiwan was interesting.....
>
> and
>
> At the Minskoff in Paris in front of all those Nureyev fans.

Dana:

> It was in Paris, and I was with the _____ company and we were performing at the Theatro de Paris.

Max:

> It was this sort of oldish theatre.... out in New Hampshire... (It was like) surprising people in Timbuktu.... Maybe (it was) the locale....

Philip:

> ....in a theatre in one of the new England states....

These dancers also reported varying proscenium stage situations. None is particularly unique except that they are out of town and away from their home base. Conceivably an out of town locale may add to the performance environment creating a more unusual, unfamiliar and exciting atmosphere. In addition, **Max** surmised that the locale may have had something to do with his enhanced performance experience.

A more unique and repeated comment from four of the dancers was that an outdoor performance was the setting for the enhanced performance experience:

Raven:

> Yeah. I remember exactly where I was. We were on stage in the south of France and out in Avignon, in the Avignon Festival. It was one of the most magnificent settings ever....It was an outdoor performance in the ruins of an abbey. It was incredible....The space just made you dance well. It was magical.

Max:

I always loved dancing outdoors....that did magical things....But dancing outdoors if it rained. That was always great.

Philip:

....back in the American Dance Festival....it was outdoors....they had built a stage for this....

Darius:

....I remember one outdoor performance in Washington, DC....

According to these four dancers, performing outdoors is unquestionably a factor. Further, it would seem that an environment of unfamiliar or new surroundings diminishes the dancer's level of control. However, the dancers indicate that their environment could have contributed in shaping the situation for an enhanced performance state.

Category: Where - Domain: Performance Configuration

Each dancer commented on the specific situations where they experienced their enhanced states. The second type of performance situation dealt with the numbers in a stage space configuration: solos, duets, trios, and larger groups. Most of the dancers considered a solo performance situation to be prime for the occurrence of an enhanced

performance state. The solo situation did not require responsibilities to a partner or other dancers. This allowed for greater ease and potential release from mental distraction. This circumstance is also referred to under Intellectual Domain. All six of the dancers told of a solo performance in which the experience occurred. All believed enhanced performance states happened most often in solos. All dancers except for Uma, danced within a duet or group situation that developed into an enhanced performance experience.

Darius related one additional situation where he claimed an enhanced performance experience:

> Often it came out of a matinee performance and I was totally relaxed....I (did not have) time to get nervous all day. You can't be as nervous on a matinee, almost never....when you are totally relaxed or you weren't worried....complete ease in front of people.

The category of *where* revealed two domains: Locale and type of performance configuration. Following are the properties and dimensions of where the dancers' were when an enhanced performance state occurred:

- Solo situation
- Exotic or unusual location
- An outdoor environment

Table 3. Category II: Where
Domains: Locale and Performance Configuration

Category II: WHERE the enhanced performance states occurred	
1. Domain: Locale	***2. Domain: Performance Configuration***
Exotic or unusual location	Solo situation (frequently)
An outdoor environment	Groups (infrequently)

Category What and How: The Qualities and Characteristics of the Actual Experience

The categories of *When* and *Where* described the circumstances that were in place preceding the enhanced performance experiences of the six professional modern dancers. The third category of the enhanced performance experience is referred to as *What* and *How*. It consists of the actual descriptions of the dancers' experiences, coded and referred to as the properties and dimensions along a continuum and placed within their respective domains. The descriptions are of experiences that were extraordinary and perceived by the dancers as uncommon, standing out from all other performances. The domains of the category of *what* and *how* are:

1. **Onset of Occurrence:** Any initial perceptions of the beginning of the enhanced performance experience.
2. **Qualities of the Experience:** Those conditions that indicate and describe the occurrence.
3. **Sensory Perceptions of the Experience:** Anything perceived through the senses of human knowing (that is, visual, auditory, tactile) and/or further perceived as altered senses or considered to be sensual in nature.

4. **Spatial Perceptions of the Experience:** Any descriptions of the dancers' awareness in space and their relationship to that space.
5. **Time Perceptions of the Experience:** Any descriptions of the dancers' comprehension of time and its effect during the enhanced performance experience.
6. **Emotions in the Experience:** Any emotional response during the experience.
7. **Power and Control:** Any reference by the dancer to an intensification of their own physical ability while performing.
8. **Involvement in the Experience:** Any reference to focus and absorption or involvement in the performance experience.
9. **Awareness of Others During the Experience:** Descriptions of how other dancers, other people, things, and audiences were perceived while in the enhanced performing state.
10. **Noticed by Others:** Any acknowledgment from an external source (audience member or other company members) that the dancer's performance was out of the ordinary.

Category: What and How - Domain: Onset of Occurrence

If it were possible to experience such unique, enhanced performances with every performance, these dancers surely would. However, no known formula can assure this will happen. The dancer cannot command an enhanced performance state to occur; it just does. The first property in the domain of onset of occurrence is that the enhanced performance state is involuntary.

That the state comes unbidden was unanimously voiced by all six dancers.

Uma:

> It just happened. That's the way the dancing was. At all times, they always took me unprepared. I mean it wasn't like I started out to achieve that. How can you set out to achieve something you've never experienced?

Dana:

> .....I felt like I didn't have to bother to wish for it. I didn't have to hope for it. I just felt that it was happening.

Raven:

> You don't know where it comes from. You don't know how you got there....not at your command.

Max:

> It was just automatic. You're just doing it. It just happens....Like I just didn't expect it.

Philip:

It is just something that comes.....It sort of took over.....just happened.

Darius:

It would just happen...Automatic.

The occurrence of an enhanced performance experience was unbidden by all of the dancers. This property is the first dimension of the experience. When an enhanced experience commences, the dancers are not noticing the onset, it is just happening. Inherent in the experience is the lack of concern for technical aspects of a performance, such as remembering steps or counting phrases. The second dimension describes properties that reveal a lack of conscious thought.

Uma:

It's not conscious, not cerebral.....No concerns or worries. (The) awareness is not conscious.

Dana:

I didn't have to try or even think consciously of trying....no conscious dynamic decisions about the movement. (I) didn't think of executing the steps....There wasn't real movement awareness.

Max:

> (I was) not thinking about doing the dance....no worries about technique. I forget remembering the steps, forget any technical trouble and just dance. No conscious thought.

Philip:

> You don't really think about it. You just do. You don't really think. (It's like) the mind going along in the body, accomplishing everything I set out to do without me controlling it.....second nature.

Darius:

> You know the steps. You do not have to do.

The dancers' enhanced performance experience does not involve conscious mental dance manipulations; steps, counts, and extraneous technical thoughts. These aspects become automatic for the dancer. The properties of the domain of onset of occurrence are:

- It is unbidden
- No conscious, cerebral thoughts are involved

Category: What and How - Domain: Qualities of Experience

The dancers' initial descriptions of the enhanced performance experiences were remarkable. Because none of their prior performances compared to this experience, no parallel descriptions could be summoned. All of the dancers considered these experiences

unequaled. Attempts by the dancers to describe the exceptional qualities of their experiences, were occasionally frustrated by normal language limitations. This domain is comprised of words and comments that attempt to distinguish the experience from usual modes of performance.

All six dancers spoke of the unique and completely different quality in their enhanced performance experience, therefore the first dimension contains properties of an unequaled or different quality.

Uma:

> ....something extraordinary, entirely different. I had never danced like that before. It was unique; a leap - a quantum leap. (It was) incredible!

Dana:

> It was something very different, very strange. (It was) very different from other performances.

Raven:

> You know when you are in it that it is special.

Max:

> (It) never happened like this before. It was a shock. It was amazing; surreal.

Philip:

(Kind of) mysterious. I knew something odd was happening. (It was) pretty amazing. This doesn't happen all of the time....So unusual....so strange. (It was) very different from other things.

Darius:

(It was) a vital experience.

During the interviews, all of the dancers grappled for descriptive words that could describe their experiences. It appeared that the experiences were so far removed from communicable language that few words fit the description. After attempting to articulate the experiences, the dancers often dropped off in mid sentences, pausing for the right words to come forth. Three of them finished the attempt by admitting the inexpressibility of the matter.

Uma:

(It is just) indescribable. I don't know what else to say. It's an attempt to describe the indescribable....It's indescribable, except it's very real if it happens to you.

Raven:

I am trying to think of (words). It is difficult to describe.

Philip:

Indescribable.

This ineffable characteristic is another property that emerges from the domain of quality of experience.

The enhanced performance experience for the modern dancer was impossible to call forth and difficult to describe. It also claimed an effortlessness and perfection. The fact that these dancers felt they danced without effort is quoted here.

Uma:

Everything was working well. It was freedom.

Dana:

It was not forced. (There was) no effort. It was easy. I was communicating effortlessly.

Raven:

(It felt like) I could do anything. (I was) capable of anything. Everything was effortless.

Max:

The stuff was there. (It was) easy. I was just doing it.

Philip:

Everything seemed to fall into place easily.

Darius:

There was this freedom.

That the performance seemed effortless and free, yet perfect at the same time, was a perception shared among them.

Uma:

Everything went perfectly. (It was) a perfect, solid performance.

Dana:

It must have gone perfectly well.

Raven:

Everything was going well. Everything was good.

Max:

(It is) a state where everything is perfect. Everything works well. (It was) all together.

Philip:

(It) just seemed like there were no mistakes. Perfection was reached.

Darius:

Everything was just right. Perfect.

As the dancers began to describe in their own words the qualities of their enhanced performance experiences, there was consistency across the sample. All six stated that it was something unusual and different; it was difficult to describe; performing seemed

without effort; and each had a sense of achieving perfection. The properties emerging from the domain of the quality of experience are:

- Unique and different
- Ineffable
- Effortless
- A sense of perfection

Category: What and How - Domain: Altered Sensory Perceptions

After the initial description of the experience was explored, the researcher began to probe for other descriptions. One way this was accomplished was by asking questions pertaining to details of the experience. When asked to describe any sensory alterations that occurred during the enhanced performance experience, the dancers revisited these moments and recalled other dimensions. One area of sensory alteration was of substance and textures. The dancers' descriptions refer to actual feelings in the body while in motion.

Uma:

It was fluid.....It was a big fluid thing.

Dana:

The movement felt thick or chewy. The air felt chewy.

Raven:

It was like floating inside a cloud.

Max:

It was like being in water; weightless. (I) sailed cloudlike. (I) can still feel and see it. (It's) like being carried on a cloud.

Darius:

Like being able to feel the textures of the dance.

Although texture and tactile sensation were not a predominant property, heightened textural awareness is present in the enhanced performance experience. No one reported a visual alteration except

Dana:

(There was) something blurry or hazy about the experience.

And **Raven** offered:

I don't remember being aware of smell or sight.

For all of the dancers, the olfactory sensation of smell was not heightened and only minimal visual alteration was perceived.

Another sense mentioned by most of the dancers was the auricular or hearing sense. Music and sound sensitivity and/or alteration was a factor in four of the dancer's enhanced performance experiences. Following are quotes from four of the dancers.

Uma:

The music for me is not separate from the dance. Dancing and music always stirred me....I have a real response level to that.... Music was a big factor in the peak things. It was absorbed.

Dana:

I remember feeling very connected to the music; very hyper aware. The music was full and filling the stage.

Raven:

The texture I could most describe would be just cotton-like soft. Everything is soft around you and muffled. Quiet, I mean very quiet. But the music kept me consciously aware.

Max:

Music was a big part of it.

Except for the specific textural descriptions, sound perceptions and one visual alteration, the dancers' responses regarding altered sensory perception were depicted as an overall heightened awareness. A comparison or resemblance to a drug induced state or high was used by some of the dancers.

Uma:

(It's like) the feeling of a high. I think it's why people keep getting high again and again. It's that thing. It must be similar.

Raven:

It must be akin to a drug induced state. All senses turn inward in a vacuum. All senses are heightened and turn inward.

Max:

Everything felt heightened; so present and so immediate.

Philip:

It is like a magnification of yourself; a high.

The properties belonging to the domain of sensory perceptions during the experience focus more on the fact that the senses were heightened overall. Specific senses such as the visual, auricular, and tactile, were mentioned by certain individuals. Not all dancers perceived heightened sensory awareness in exactly the same way, although similarities emerged. Enhanced performance states of modern dancers could include the following properties of sensory alteration but not necessarily all:

- Visual alteration
- Tactile alteration
- Music and/or auditory alteration
- A heightened sensory state likened to a drug induced high

One more dimension under the domain of heightened senses refers to other feelings the dancers experienced. The property is sensual awareness of self in the experience. Five of the dancers had other feelings of themselves in the enhanced performance state relating to sensory alteration. These include sensuous and seductive feelings, and feeling beautiful.

Uma:

I'm beautiful (in the dance), really beautiful.

Dana:

I felt very womanly; very female.

Raven:

It felt magical. It was a seductive state that was wonderful to be in. I didn't want to leave it. I could stay forever in this comfortable state. A wonderful feeling.

Max:

I felt like I danced beautifully.

From this other sensory category come additional properties of the enhanced performance state.

- Sensuality
- Seductive feelings
- Feeling beautiful

Category: What and How - Domain: Altered Spatial Perceptions

Spatial alteration was strongly perceived and widely experienced by each dancer in several ways. The actual space in which the dance took place was perceived by the dancer to change. The dancer's use of space within the dance was reported as different. Moreover, the individual shape of the dancer was perceived to change which altered the space the dancer occupied. Finally, the dancers told of feeling far away from the actual dance and performance space, experiencing another level or space or area.

In the dimension of space alteration are individually perceived changes of performance space and self.

Uma:

> It seemed limitless, with no boundary, no periphery. The experience was big and enormous and all space.

Dana:

> I felt large and small at the same time.

Raven:

> This moment went beyond space.

Philip:

> It was boundless, a limitless kind of space.

A sense of being outside of the dance and the body space was mentioned by five of the dancers. Comments such as seeing oneself performing while in the performance were prevalent.

Uma:

> I was beyond myself watching myself do it. I was outside and in the center at the same time.

Dana:

> I felt far away spatially but directly connected. I was there and not there. I was somewhere else for that evening and yet in the solo. I was outside of the actual choreography.... like I wasn't there but I was doing it.

Raven:

> I went out; out of my body to another plane.

Philip:

> I felt outside of myself. (Like I was) aware but outside of everything, just seeing it as I was doing it.

Darius:

> I could see myself doing it. (It was like) I was inside and outside of myself at once.

The properties of spatial perception include:

- Observing oneself performing from outside while performing
- Sense of limitless, boundless space
- Feeling big and small at the same time

Category: What and How - Domain: Altered Time Perceptions

When performing in an enhanced performance state, the dancer's sense of time was not perceived in a real accurate sense. Time seemed to speed up or slow down, stop completely or stretch. For this group of dancers, time during an enhanced performance experience was always perceived in a different way from real time. However, none reported time speeding up during the enhanced performance moment. This domain is by far one of the most unique, in part because the time factor seemed to affect them still, well after the experience.

Uma:

> It was like there is no time and all time. There was no sense of real time. (There was) no conscious time clocking.

Dana:

> It was a time alteration in a dream like sense where you have episodic involved dreams or a long dramatic film in actually a short amount of time.

Raven:

> Time stopped. It (was) timeless. There was no sense of real time.

Max:

> A crack in time opens up. Time slowed or stopped. Moments stretched out and are still stretching. A transitory moment cracked open. This moment is always present in my memory and even more present than the drive I took today.

Philip:

> I felt like I was suspended in a time warp. Everything seemed to go on forever. Time slowed down.

Darius:

> There was no sense of real time....(It) can seem to stretch time and linger longer in the moments.

Time alteration was vivid in description, and was represented as an important factor in the experience of a dancer's enhanced performance state. The experience as a whole, seems to belong to the dancer's state of inner time. The properties of this domain emerged as:

- No sense of clock time
- Time slows or stops
- Moments stretch and continue

Category: What and How - Domain: Emotions in the Experience

The dancers stated that a variety of emotions were present just prior to a performance *(*Category of *when).* The emotions experienced during an enhanced performance state however, were not congruent with the pre-performance emotional state. Emotional feeling within the dance was conveyed as intense, but no one reported negative emotions. One

dancer's performance characterization was intentionally more somber than elated though heightened. The dancer's actual emotional perceptions of the *experience* were perceived as positive. **Dana's** experience is just that:

> It was a very sort of poignant solo in the first place....When I performed it I tried to get a sense of vulnerability in it, because it needed that....My emotional state was that I felt very vulnerable and....like I was in my own little world emotionally....(but after) I felt very joyous....

Overall, the dancers' emotional perceptions were of joy and elation.

Uma:

> I was just beaming....in a sense feeling an enormous joy....Now that was joy....definitely joy....(and) felt love....

Raven:

> It was really fabulous. Really euphoric. It was really a sheer feeling of power and enjoyment.

Max:

> ....(I) enjoyed getting every moment....

Philip:

> ....it is enjoyment.

Darius:

> Doing that dance, I was in an ecstatic state.

Joy was the emotion most strongly endorsed by the six dancers. It was stated several ways: elation, euphoria, ecstasy, love, and beaming. The emotional state of the enhanced performance experience consisted of:

- Intensified feelings owing to the emotional characterization of the dance
- Heightened positive feelings of happiness and joy

Category: What and How - Domain: Power and Control

Simultaneously accompanying their descriptions of emotions, came added comments about physical intensification. Raven's previous comment referring to *"....a sheer feeling of power and enjoyment...."*, illustrates this. Hand-in-hand with the positive emotional aspect was a sense of control and confidence; everything was good and everything was within their grasp.

Uma:

> (I) felt confident....a higher sense of power....a higher self...

Dana:

> I remember feeling very, very in control, and what we say, on top of the movement. Sort of like a feeling of power because I knew nothing was going to go wrong....and yet my physical self felt very empowered and in control and very large....and I felt that kind of physical power through the rest of the piece....(It continued on into the next dance

piece) and I remember feeling very in control during that whole piece also. I just remember feeling extremely on top of my dancing.

Raven:

....because it was really a sheer feeling of power and....that you were capable of doing anything....you're empowered when you're in this....like you're in a vacuum of your own power without it being straight power....it keeps coming back that you could do anything. You were in complete control....senses turn inward and empowers you even further....You're empowered by it.

Max:

I felt vital....in control....

Philip:

You know you had (everything) down so well.... you were in complete control...

Darius:

I (felt) great power in (performance)....(I learned to) just let that power (take over). It was a vital experience.

The dancers felt in control and totally self empowered throughout the performance. They knew everything they did would be right. Properties of this domain are:

- Confidence
- Self empowerment
- In control

♦ Vital

Category: What and How - Domain: Focus and Involvement

Once the dancers' were able to relax and let go of minor distractions, they became involved completely in the dance. An underlying sense of focus, involvement and absorption was experienced. This domain is conceivably a consequence of the category of *when: 'when I could relax'* and *'when there was no mental distraction'.*

Uma:

> ....a loss of personal ego....(I) was not self conscious. (There was) total involvement and absorption in the dance.

Dana:

> I felt connected....and very involved with the character. The performance was very focused....into the role.

Raven:

> You're channeling everything into one area.

Max:

> It just all comes together.

Philip:

> (I) felt connected....Those things...converged on that particular moment.

Darius:

I was totally absorbed in the dance....

Focus is expressed as coming together, converging, and channeling. As well, being absorbed by, feeling connected to and involved in the dance were mentioned. Properties emerged as:

- Total focus
- Complete involvement

Category: What and How - Domain: Awareness of Others

While the dancers were completely focused and involved in their own performance, the awareness of others on stage was altered to some degree. Their descriptions did not reveal a lack of awareness of others. Rather, the dancer was so completely committed to the process of performing, things or people not pertinent to the performance faded from focus or were simply not involved. The audience also plays a part in this domain. Some of the dancers claimed that the audience was a very important part of the enhanced performance experience while others said audience awareness impaired the illusion. This first group of quotes refers to the dancers' awareness of others and things on stage:

Uma:

> It was like nobody else was on stage. I mean they were....and they were not there. I didn't notice them at all. They disappeared.

Dana:

> I had no awareness of others dancing. (I was) not even thinking about them.

Raven:

> I separated from my partner (in awareness) and was not aware of him at that moment.

Max:

> I must have been aware of other things because props and things were thrown in but....they were nothing to be concerned about.

Philip:

> We were aware of each other as performers....tuned into each other....a togetherness in group works where we had worked together a long time. But the stage was our own little world. It seemed to be unto itself....like the whole world revolved around this little black box.

Due to a complete involvement in the dance, other dancers and other things on stage such as sets and props, were not noticed by the performers during an enhanced performance experience. In Philip's group performance, he and his fellow dancers functioned as a unit, oblivious to things outside of their space in the 'black box'. The

dancers' awareness of others and things on stage developed into the following properties:

- No awareness of other dancers

or

- Not aware of people or things outside of the performing unit
- Not concerned with things

The dancer's awareness of the audience depended on the type of performance. If the dancer felt that being connected to the audience was important for a successful performance, then awareness of and reaction to the audience was heightened. Awareness of the audience was minimized or disregarded if the dancer felt acknowledgment of their presence was not necessarily important to the success of the performance.

Uma:

> I preferred not to pay attention to the audience. I seldom was aware of the audience. If I could see them it was always more distracting. It impaired the illusion.

Dana:

> I felt I was really reaching the audience. I felt the audience knew what I was feeling. The audience knew I was having this incredible moment.

Raven:

I was an audience performer. I mean....things I could never do in class or rehearsal, I could do on stage. (Although) the audience supported the experience, (they) didn't matter so much. This moment was not dependent on the audience. This came from somewhere else. It was beyond the audience.

Max:

I felt an immediate audience connection. I had them and they had me. I was one with the audience and hyper-aware of the audience. I could feel and see their eyes.

Philip:

The audience reaction has a lot to do with the experience. It is a spontaneous give and take. I am aware of the audience and not at the same time.

Darius:

I heard the audience (reaction) with every gesture.

Awareness of the audience was individual but more apparent if the type of dance was helped by audience energy. Awareness of the audience ranged accordingly:

- Seldom aware of the audience
- Totally connected to and/or at one with the audience
- Feeling the audience knew of the enhanced performance experience

Category: What and How - Domain: Noticed by Outside Others

Dana said she felt the audience knew of her enhanced performance experience. If this were possible, then a sort of personal validation of the dancer's experience was conceivable. In this domain, such accounts are documented as the individual dancer related them, however, the information is second hand and not taken from the actual observer of the dance.

Uma commented that her artistic director noticed the difference as did a fellow dancer in the company.

Uma:

> ....and M. Said, 'Do you know what you just did? It doesn't happen very often.' He was able to see (the change) because he had seen me dance this piece (numerous) times in rehearsal. And J. said, 'Wow! That was something.'

On another occasion, her artistic director had been watching from the audience, later came back stage, and in the same manner as above commented on the state of a performance she felt had been perfect. In a third experience, **Uma** tells of a friend who noticed the difference:

> My friend N.A. said, 'My God! What happened to you out there? You have never danced like that.' And I said, 'I know that.'

After the bows and off stage, following one of **Dana's** enhanced performance experiences, a fellow company member approached her:

> She said, 'My God! What happened out there? You got more applause than even M (the star dancer).' She said, 'I felt something. What was going on out there tonight?'....It was like whatever I felt was happening to me, became validated because the audience did know. And the fact that one of the dancers said this to me also (strengthened the validation)....

Raven's partner in their duet detected the difference in one of her enhanced performance experiences:

> When we came off stage (my partner) said to me, 'What happened to you? You lost yourself in the dance.' I said to him, 'I don't know J . I just went to another place....'

Max said there was a mutual acknowledgment of the occurrence between his partner and himself that was never spoken:

> Although we both knew (that this performance was unique), I never discussed this with my partner.

Darius said his artistic director noticed something different at the time of his enhanced performance experience and his artistic director's acknowledgment provided personal validation. But, according to Darius, the director's ego was challenged because he was also performing with Darius at the time. Darius sensed distrust from

the director's response since it came from a sense competition or jealousy:

> (He) noticed and believe it or not, was sort of jealous [sic].

The property that emerged from this domain is:

- Outside observers who noticed a difference in the level of the dancer's performance provide personal validation

Table 4a. Category III: What and How Domains: 1 through 5 (10 Domains in total- see Table 4b. Next page)

Category III: What and How **Qualities and characteristics of the actual enhanced performance experience**				
1. Domain: Onset of occurrence	***2. Domain: Qualities of Experience***	***3. Domain: Altered Sensory Perceptions***	***4. Domain: Altered Spatial Perceptions***	***5. Domain: Altered Time Perceptions***
It is unbidden	Unique and different	Visual alteration	Observing oneself performing from outside	No sense of real time
No conscious, cerebral thoughts involved	Ineffable	Tactile alteration	Sense of limitless, boundless space	Time slows or stops
	Effortless	Music and/or auditory alteration	Feeling big and small at the same time	Moments stretch and continue
	A sense of perfection	A heightened sensory state likened to a drug induced high		
		Sensuality		
		Seductive feelings		
		Feeling beautiful		

Table 4b. Category III: What and How Domains: 6 through 10 (10 Domains in total- see Table 4a. Previous page)

Category III: What and How **Qualities and characteristics of the actual enhanced performance experience**				
6. Domain: Emotions in the experience	***7. Domain: Power and control***	***8. Domain: Focus and involvement***	***9. Domain: Awareness of others***	***10. Domain: Noticed by outside observers***
Intensified feelings owing to the emotional characterization of the dance	Confidence	Total focus	No awareness of other dancers or of the audience	Audience members noticed a change in level of performance
Heightened positive feelings of happiness and joy	Self empowerment	Complete involvement	Not aware of things or people outside of the performing unit	Other dancers noticed a change in level of performance
	In control		Totally connected to and/or at one with the audience	
	Vital		Feeling that the audience knew of the enhanced performance state	

Category IV: After - Domain: Transformation

All of the domains discussed previously have been defined by descriptive properties of the enhanced performance state. Voluntarily, each dancer offered a summary of their experiences. In every instance, a major change in performance was acclaimed. Alterations were observed in the modes of perceiving as were shifts in the level of experiencing. The overall picture painted by the dancer was one of metamorphosis or transformation.

Uma began this way:

> (When this happens) you go beyond the basic level. I reached another place or another level....It is like all one. Dance and dancer are one. I consider it a gift, a transcendent experience that all of us hope for. It is a truth that resonates; a transformation.

Dana:

> I felt like I reached a special level; like riding some kind of an energy level. It allowed me to go to this other place....(In the one experience) it was like my whole life was happening on stage. I was doing the dance but I was beyond the dance and the choreography.

Raven:

> I wanted to make this performance seem other worldly; on a different level. But this was like you go out somewhere and only realize that you've had (this experience) after you come back. The energy of it elevates you to another level, another space....You merge into a space out of time....

Max:

It is like a zone; some state; some area where you respond on a different level.

Philip:

It is like entering another world; another level. It is a transformation.

Darius:

I felt transformed....

The properties of the domain of transformation are:

- A shift in level, place, or zone
- Another world; another reality
- A transformation

Category: After

Domain: Dancers' Personal Contingency Theories

The dancers had their own theories of when and how they experienced an enhanced performance state. None had definitive answers although they offered personal insights and explanations. One point of agreement for the six was that this state could not be called up; one could not just make it happen. Therefore, it was a rare but often hoped for performance experience in modern dancers. **Uma** pondered this issue a lot and had several insights:

....(When) one is at a certain pitch, or energy vibration; a vivacity and enthusiasm....and that pitch is what can push you into those other areas....(When) there is something that pushes you out of the ho-hum everydayness....We (dancers) get so centered and then you have to decentralize. (To do this) it might be the something that gets you beyond the little me or that part of your head that gets in the way, and that could be a device that you talk yourself into; a device to get the ego out of the way....Years of experience contribute to the performance experience. Experience and knowing the dance allow for ease and best performance....If you are really absorbed in something, the world drops away.

Dana:

....By doing a dance I knew well and because I had choreographed it perhaps allowed me to go to this other place.

Raven:

For me, experience and comfort are inherent having an experience and the fact that the dance demanded the best of my skill physically and artistically.

Max:

Experience with the dance allows you to do well; forget remembering steps, forget any technical trouble and just dance. I think we have a number of layers of memory. Like, I just wrote down some airplane flights. I don't remember the numbers, but the moment the (travel agent) told me I remembered them. You can remember for ten years an old phone number. You always remember how to talk. There are always these different layers of memory going on in our brains. I think sometimes what would normally be a transitory moment, cracks open and becomes much more than a transitory moment. And

I wonder if that's what happens on stage during an experience. I don't know. Or maybe because it is happening it cracks open.

Philip:

It (seems probable) after all of those years of experience.

Darius:

You had to perform a lot. Experience helped make it happen.

The dancers' shared some similar personal contingency theories with the predominant property being years of dancing experience. Following are the properties that emerged from the dancers' personal contingency theory domain:

- Experience dancing
- Involvement in the work
- Pleasure in the doing
- Devices that help the dancer go beyond ego, self, and other obstructions

Category: After - Domain: Post Experience Reflection

Long after the enhanced performance experience occurred, the dancers continued to place value on it. For some it is still felt; as if the experience can be relived just by remembering. It fuels the hope that

other experiences like it will follow, or just provides an exceptional reference for other life experiences.

Uma:

I felt like I couldn't take credit for it. I felt like I had been given a gift. Obviously, I had something to do with it but it was like I was given something. It was an experience and I thought no career was worth as much....(just) to know that this experience can happen....

Dana:

I'm waiting for the next one....

Raven:

There's nothing better in the world. (Because) you lose yourself, and that sense of ego, (I compare it to) the loss of self and the merger of souls. It is very akin to that feeling of giving yourself over so totally to your (children).

Max:

That moment exists right now....if you get back and experience it. It always exists for me. It's right there and in my memory I can visit it. You know that dance was only fifteen minutes long but as far as I'm concerned, it's still going on.

Philip:

After it first happened I thought it would always be like this. Even now, as I still perform, it is that moment that I perform for.

Darius:

> ....you learn to spend as much time in your life as you want to on these performance moments....stretching into time.

Even though these experiences are few and the time between can be far, an enhanced performance state sets the tone for career and life expectations for many of these dancers. It represents the peak that all other performances are measured against. As a hallmark in life, as well as performance, *'no career is worth as much'.*

Properties of the domain of post experience reflection are:

- Hope for the recurrence of an enhanced performance experience
- The moment continues long after it actually transpires
- The experience provides inspiration for other life experiences

Table 5 Category IV: After Domains: 1 - 3

Category IV: After **The dancers' view of their experiences after; feelings, personal theories, and reflections**		
1. Domain: Transformation	***2. Domain: Dancers' personal contingency theories***	***3. Domain: Post experience reflection***
A shift in level, place or zone	Experience dancing	The dancers hoped that the enhanced performance experience would happen again
Another world; another reality	Involvement in the work	The moment continues long after it actually transpires
A transformation	Pleasure in the doing	The experience provides inspiration for other life experiences
	Devices that help the dancer to go beyond ego, self, and other obstructions	

Summary

This investigation into the experiences of modern dancers in enhanced performance states yielded rich and thick descriptions, as evidenced in this chapter. From these descriptions, qualities and characteristics of the experiences emerged. Categories and their domains were developed through the analysis of these characteristics, which by themselves, formed the properties and dimensions of the domains.

Four distinct categories emerged from the interviews:

1. The category of **when** presents the events or circumstances as they affected the dancer: physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. These domains and their various aspects are capable of influencing when the dancer experiences an enhanced performance state.
2. The category of **where** presents the domains of locale and performance configuration, examining the dancer's environment and relationship to place and others when experiencing an enhanced performance state.
3. The category of **what and how** describes in the dancers' own words, what was experienced and how the enhanced performance state was actually perceived. Discussed as properties and

dimensions along a continuum, these perceptions begin with the onset of the experience and the qualities that set it apart. Thicker descriptions discuss sensory, spatial, and time perceptions as well as any emotional response to the enhanced performance experience. Absorption, focus, and feelings of intensified power and control, while in the experience, were reported. The dancers also described an altered awareness of the audience, other dancers and things. Personal validation to the dancer came from the observations of outside others who detected a significant change in the dancer's performance level.

4. The category of **after** emerged as a post experience reflection by the dancers. All six dancers felt a sense of transformation occurred. After their experiences, each one felt changed as a performer; a new level had been attained. Personal theories of why the enhanced performance states occurred accompanied comments that these experiences left them with life impressions.

These results, rich in information from the dancers' interviews, invite comparisons to the previous research. Because the dancers' experiences are uniquely perceived yet similar to the athlete in sport, these results generate other areas for discussion.

V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter discusses the findings of the study of modern dancers in enhanced performance states and specifically compares these data sets to the combined research of others in the area of sport related participation. The main research question -- What is the nature of enhanced performance states in modern dancers and how are they perceived? -- also takes into account the categories of *when* and *where,* which address the circumstances of the dancer prior to the onset of occurrence. Considering these findings and the funded knowledge, I will support the claim that enhanced performance states are experienced in the professional modern dancer. Second, I will convey how the dancer perceives these states, noting specific similarities to research in peak experience, peak performance and flow.

Discussion of Findings

The dancers' initially related their accounts of enhanced performance experiences in descriptive, exclamatory words and phrases: some of which were 'extraordinary', 'unique', 'incredible', 'wonderful'. The details of these qualities emerged with deeper, thicker descriptions as the interviews progressed. Each dancer felt it was important to

discuss their pre-performance experiences (before the enhanced performance state), believing what had transpired in their lives contributed to this moment.

Kimiecik and Stein (1992) address the speculative issue: how do flow states occur in an actual act of participation in a sports activity? Acknowledging that little research actually examines this aspect, they suggest the following in order to better understand how this state occurs:

1) go beyond the description of the elements of a flow (or other enhanced performance) experience

2) systematically examine the interaction of person and situation variables that may underlie that experience.

Through the category of *when,* this study attempts to examine some of the conditions pertaining to the dancer's view of the experience prior to the enhanced performance state.

Category I: **When** groups the findings regarding particular conditions in the dancers' lives that may have influenced the onset of the enhanced performance state. The domains of physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual conditions were identified.

Domain: Physical

Fatigue, a property within the physical domain, was reported by the dancers, as a condition present prior to an enhanced performance experience. Uma had been involved in a long, exhausting rehearsal situation that led to an enhanced performance state. Max had experienced weariness and travel fatigue while Darius often felt tired when enhanced performance states took place. This experience is also noted by Nagrin to happen, '...deep in the heart of fatigue'. Hanna (1987), comments that altered states of consciousness may be induced by physical behavior such as kinesthetic stress, overexertion, and fatigue. These conditions are known to increase one's susceptibility to experiencing altered states of consciousness (Neher 1962). Therefore, this research concurs with the previous work of others.

A sense of ease or a *relaxed state* is noted by Uma, Raven and Darius, and described as an important comfort zone. Unanimously, all of the dancers attributed this state to the *years of physical dancing experience*. A relaxed state equates with a sense of ease in performing or doing anything. Maslow (1968), lists effortlessness as a 'value of being' and that ease and a lack of strain are qualities therein. The *frequency of performing the specific dance* was also important. The

dancers felt they could not really dance well and be comfortable with the role until they had danced it many times. This relaxed, easy state could appear once the dancers' years of training and performing experience culminated.

Ravizza (1984) states that as a precondition to the peak experience, the (dancer) must achieve a mastery of the basic skills. At the time these dancers encountered their enhanced performance experiences, each one felt a superior level of technical expertise had been attained. They enjoyed the *challenge* that particular dances gave them because it *was within their ability* to perform. Therefore, the dancer no longer thought about technical skill execution because they had performed these dances many times before, and had attained a sense of performance ease. Not only is this element of performance important to the peak experience, but also to flow. One of the basic elements of a flow state involves the 'merging of action and awareness' or when the perceived challenge of an activity matches skills (Csikszentmihalyi (1977).

Maslow (1971) suggested that peak experience is a result of peak performance wherein the performer consciously makes an effort to better their own level of performance. Peak performance is defined

operationally as behavior which exceeds one's average performance in any endeavor (Privette 1982). Here, the performer knows that their ability to attain the challenge exists. Because peak performance is an intentional effort to better one's personal best, it is associated with competition against others. However, this is contrary to peak experience and flow where effort is not a conscious focus of the performer.

When the dancers experienced an enhanced performance state, experience dancing and a matched challenge to physical ability were paramount. This agreed with the previous research in peak experience and flow. The properties of fatigue and relaxation were also comparable with this research and the research into altered states of consciousness (ASC).

Domain: Mental

Each dancer remarked on the aspect of the dance that stimulated them mentally and allowed them greater focus. Total focus, through a specific quality or stimulating aspect, allowed the dancer to balance the physical challenge with the mental challenge. The dance needed to be *mentally stimulating* or needed to engage the dancer in mental activity that matched or enhanced the physical challenge. Moreover,

when the dance possessed a quality or focus that captured the dancer's imagination, was *fun and/or exciting*, it could consequently *inhibit distractions* capable of impeding the performance. This aspect agrees with the research on peak experience, wherein the athlete's concentration is so immersed in the activity that the mental focus automatically adjusts to the task-relevant cues (Ravizza 1984). In flow, centering of attention on a limited stimulus field is an important aspect (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975).

A *connection to the character portrayed* or the *dramatic context of the dance* was important within the mental domain and provided a hook or focus for the dancer's performance. It could be compared to peak experience's narrow focus of attention where all consciousness is channeled into the present moment (Ravizza 1984). This may also provide a place in which to channel personal emotional energy. Total absorption is characteristic in flow and peak performance experiences (Privette and Bundrick, 1991).

Respect and *trust* are two other important mental properties the dancers claimed to be important. Trust refers to the integrity of the work which consequently allows the dancer to respect it. Their confidence in the dance, stemmed from knowledge that the work was of a good quality and that they were good dancing in it. According to

Csikszentmihalyi (1975), these are contributing factors to intrinsic motivation, which is integral to flow states. Gardner (1993), referring to Amabile's work in the area of intrinsic motivation, reiterates this need in order for flow states to occur. Intrinsically motivated dancers perform a dance for sheer pleasure when they like, trust and respect the work. It is not necessarily for possible external rewards. Modern dancers do not compete or attempt to outdo the next dancer. Rather, they involve themselves solely in the performance of a choreographed work for the sake of its artistic communication. A greater potential for a flow and/or peak experience is suggested for the dancer who is intrinsically motivated rather than extrinsically motivated.

Intellectually, when the dancers experienced an enhanced performance state, the dance was either *mentally stimulating*, *fun/exciting*, or possessed *a dramatic or character hook* that enabled total absorption and focus. This focus and absorption likely prevented any mental distraction based on performance concerns for technical execution. An added appreciation for the dance work could also be considered a form of focus that keeps the dancer from experiencing mental distraction while performing.

Domain: Emotional

During the interview process, the dancers spontaneously shared what they felt and experienced emotionally before their performances. It seemed important to them that their prior moods and feelings be known and that how they felt emotionally affected their performances.

The day of a performance appeared to be out of the ordinary. The pattern that appeared within this category revealed that a heightened emotional state, or one that is in some way out of the ordinary, exists when the dancer has an experience. These heightened emotional responses varied and emerged as *nervousness*, *anxiety* as preoccupation with other life issues, some *feelings of unhappiness* and more frequently, *feelings of elation and joy*.

Ravizza (1984) discusses preexisting emotional conditions, such as extreme stress, that have an impact on the performance outcome. However, these have negative connotations and are the antithesis of peak experience. They suggest that the athlete lacks control due the level of stress and tension. Also, anxiety and boredom are considered to be the counter states of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975). Four of the dancers experienced either nervousness, anxiety or stress derived from outer sources but went on to experience an enhanced performance state anyway.

Whether the dancer experienced happiness or unhappiness, anxiety or nervousness before the performance only suggests that the dancer perceives the day of the performance differently from ordinary days. Whatever emotion the dancers experienced on the day of performance, was indeed heightened. In this study, an enhanced performance state was experienced regardless of the emotional timbre or mode of the day. Thus, the findings of this research differ somewhat with the established research because the dancers were capable of surpassing lesser emotional states to reach an enhanced performance state.

Domain: Spiritual

The literature on enhanced performance states is full of references to spiritual comparisons. This is particularly true in peak experience. These references, however, concern the actual enhanced performance experience discussed later in this chapter. The category of *when* is a compilation of conditions that precedes the experience. Therefore, this domain looks only at the spiritual references made by the dancers before experiencing an enhanced performance state.

Feelings of premonition refer to the dancers' instinctive feelings or precognition that their performance was going to be very different,

out of the ordinary and unique. The phrase, 'I had a feeling that....' implies that the dancer sensed something unusual was about to unfold. Some believed that *a force other than the self influenced the performance* outcome. Uma connected this feeling directly to her spiritual lessons and her relative understanding of higher power. In one instance, when her nervousness became so extreme, she appealed to a higher power preceding an enhanced performance experience. Other references by the dancers were similar; a feeling that nothing was going to go wrong or 'when the spirit takes you.' These findings are consistent with Murphy and White (1978), who recount numerous stories by athletes and others who confided premonitions, precognizant events and 'other' presences such as spiritual guides or angels, appearing before the significant event or performance.

A Zen comparison by Philip, referred to a time before a performance when he and his peers consciously focused and imaged themselves; dancing as one, with each other, and the dance. It resembles a calm, or peaceful meditation. Murphy and White (1978) include numerous pre-performance spiritual feelings experienced by others that preceded enhanced performance states. In a reference to Zen, peace and stillness they said:

> This sense of peace can be found in any stage of sport. Sometimes it precedes -- although it is integrally related to -- the actual act of participation. (p. 13)

Pre-competitive self talk and mental preparedness may serve a similar purpose. Nideffer (1992) devotes much of his book Psyched to Win, to this aim: focusing on mastering mental skills and building up faith in one's ability to perform.

Most all the dancers included inferences to premonitory and/or spiritual belief before experiencing enhanced performance states. Although highly individual, these dancers felt their feelings and insights had some bearing on when they experienced enhanced performances.

The assumption that prior conditions in the dancers' lives may affect when the enhanced performance state occurs was supported in the findings. It was further reinforced by the literature in the physical, mental, and spiritual areas, but differed in the emotional domain. Also, similarities in the spiritual domain to the literature on self-talk and mental preparedness could be concluded.

Category II: Where

Domains: Locale and performance configuration

The setting or *locale* where the enhanced performance state occurred may have influenced the dancer's enhanced performance moment. Likewise, *where* refers to the dancer's position within the context of the dance, the stage space, or the group. The domains then are *locale* and *performance configuration.*

The locations of these enhanced performance experiences varied. All the dancers felt that where they performed had an impact on the enhanced performance experience. Performing outdoors, in a foreign country, solo or in a group configuration, the *where* findings indicated that the situation was unique and possessed a more individual performance focus. The findings tentatively indicate that these are potential variables and may be causally related or associated with the experience.

Privette's (1982) experiential topology on peak performance in sports, contains a factor item that relates or supports the domain of where. This factor - *Pleasant, Easy Beginning* - states that the beauty of the setting influenced the performance and that the performer was fascinated by the act. Thus, the dancer's awareness of the beauty of an outdoor setting parallels this finding.

Since flow is a subjective experience, Kimiecik and Stein (1992) suggest that examination of the potential variables that may be causally related or associated with the experience, is worthy of investigation. It is one thing to know what feelings accompany the experience. It is quite another to know what conditions are cited by the dancer as influencing the onset of the experience.

Category III: What and How

Domain: Onset of occurrence examines the qualities and characteristics of the actual experience. The findings within this category lend the greatest support and/or partial support for results reported in previous research.

First, the enhanced performance experience came *unbidden.* None of the dancers expected anything unusual or out of the ordinary to occur. Further, none could consciously produce this enhanced performance state. This agrees with Maslow's descriptor which says peak experience is a non-voluntary state (1968). These experiences are not planned or brought about by design; they just happen.

Second, *no conscious thought* processes were involved in attaining this peak. Characteristically, enhanced performance experiences are devoid of worries or concerns. The dancers all

mentioned that there was no conscious thinking about performing the choreography; one could forget remembering steps. The dancer did not have to think about the dance; only to let the dance unfold. Ravizza (1984) refers to this property of the enhanced performance experience as transcendence of self, wherein athletes simply do the appropriate task without consciously thinking about it. He attributes this to the athlete's total involvement and going all out:

"To reach this level of intensity the athlete must surrender the usual thinking-evaluating self to the experience" (p. 458).

Murphy and White (1977) refer to the fact that one does not consciously have to plan how to act; instead one lets the appropriate responses happen of themselves. Nideffer (1992) also puts the experience into the context of total immersion:

> "They must first develop their physical skills to the point where the need to shift attention from an external to an internal focus is reduced or eliminated. In other words, they must be capable of performing automatically." (p. 26)

The dancers' comments then are congruent with the existing research. Their mastery of basic skills and experience in the dance is comparable with the precondition to the peak experience, peak performance and flow.

Domain: Qualities of the Experience

The dancer's descriptions of the experience were *'unique and different'*, *'ineffable'*, *'effortless'*, and had *'a sense of perfection'*. Ravizza's (1984) athletes experienced a sense of awe and wonder with the quality of the experience, which parallels the responses felt by the dancers: incredible, amazing and surreal; even mysterious. Privette (1982) and Privette and Bundrick (1991), include the factor of 'ineffable' in their findings of athletes' experiences in peak experience, and peak performance. Again, the dancers found the experience indescribable yet very real.

A feature of peak experience as constructed by Maslow (1968) is: "....effortlessness and ease of functioning when one is at one's best." (p. 106)

He also includes effortlessness, uniqueness and perfection, as values of being in peak experience. Murphy and White (1977) concur that feats usually demanding and taxing--even exhausting--are completed with ease. An effortless, perfect performance experience is described similarly by athletes and dancers: everything works well without effort; a sense of freedom exists and everything goes perfectly; just right. The experience of a perfect moment leads the athlete (and dancer) to an understanding of intrinsic satisfaction (Ravizza, 1984).

Domain: Altered Sensory Perceptions

Domain: Altered Spatial Perceptions

Domain: Altered Time Perceptions

These domains are perhaps the most intriguing. The dancers descriptive properties herein were fascinating, vast, and individually varied. They included:

Sensory - visual alteration, tactile alteration, music and /or auditory alteration, a heightened sensory awareness, sensuality, seductive and beautiful feelings.

Spatial - observing oneself from the outside performing, limitless or boundless space, and altered size perceptions.

Time - stopped, slowed or stretched.

All of these are considered experiential criteria for detecting an altered state of consciousness (ASC) according to Tart (1975). Ravizza (1984) states that different types of altered perceptions vary widely among athletes. There are at least three areas in which discernible variations from the usual movement perceptions are experienced: (a) the quality of the experience, (b) time disorientation, and (c) spatial alteration. Privette and Bundrick (1991) include all of these criteria as factors in their data and theoretical constructs for peak experience, peak performance and flow. Murphy and White (1978) considered many of

these properties as mystical sensations: from a simple sense of well being to exotic moments when the body seems to stop time, or change shape, or free the self to travel out of the body. Nideffer (1992) also cites body image change, time alteration, and perceptual distortions in sport, attributing these phenomena primarily to peak experience and altered states of consciousness (ASC). Csikszentmihalyi's concept of flow includes altered perceptions of time, too. However, in flow time is often perceived as passing by quickly (1993). The dancers' perceptions of time in enhanced performance states were usually slower, stretched and sometimes stopped. Thus the results concur with the previous research, and particularly with that of peak experience.

Domain: Emotions in the Experience

The sixth domain contains the following properties: *Intensified feelings owing to the emotional characterization of the dance* and *heightened positive feelings of happiness and joy.* Emotions in an altered state of consciousness can be felt with extreme intensity. Other criteria include an alteration in the response to the stimuli -- overreacting, under reacting, not reacting, or reacting in an entirely different way (Tart, 1975). Ravizza (1984) said,

"Athletes describe the peak experience as euphoric...." (p. 457).

All the dancers included words such as 'euphoric', 'beaming', 'love', 'joy', 'ecstatic' but also closely associated these feelings with **power** and being in **control** which is addressed in the seventh domain.

Domain: Power and Control

Properties of *confidence, self empowerment, control,* and *feeling vital* are included in domain seven. Murphy and White (1977) correlate this feeling of power to occasions where athletes were involved in higher risk situations. Self mastery and a sense of control are at par. "At its fullest, the feeling of being in control is a unifying experience involving the athlete's entire sense of self, the environment and even (his/her) destiny." Uma's performance, dealing with highly technical and difficult components, as well as being paired with a renown ballet dancer, correlates with this analogy. Moreover, all the dancers associated these feelings with performances that were technically difficult and challenging. Ravizza (1984) points out that an athlete has a dual concern to master the work and control the situation in order to reach specific goals in competitive situations. In pursuing these goals, the intensity of the peak experience pushes the athlete to new levels of performance. This is true in part for the dancer who faces a

particularly challenging performance; to master the work and control the situation in order to fulfill the communicative intent of the choreography. Herein the modern dancer differs from the athlete in that he/she is not faced with reaching specific competitive goals. These properties are also partly reinforced by the factors in Privette's peak performance study (1982) and by factors from the research of Privette and Bundrick (1991). Some of these are 'awareness of power', 'all-powerful joy', 'nothing could destroy me', 'full of force', 'strength came from an unusual source'.

Domain: Focus and involvement

The eighth domain of enhanced performance states of modern dancers centers on these properties: focused awareness and complete involvement. They are also integral components of all the current research on peak experience, peak performance and flow. Complete absorption in the movement task represents the height of focused awareness in peak experience. Ravizza (1984):

> "...the athlete's concentration is so immersed in the activity that the mental focus automatically adjusts to the task-relevant cues."
> (p. 455)

Flow is a particularly rich source of information pertinent to focus and complete absorption. These properties are fundamental to the flow experience. The following is an excerpt from Csikszentmihalyi (1975):

> "In flow, *(a)* a person is able to concentrate on a limited stimulus field, *(b)* in which he or she can use his or her skills to meet clear demands, *(c)* thereby forgetting his or her problems and *(d)* his or her own separate identity, *(e)* at the same time obtaining a feeling of control over the environment *(g)* which may result in a transcendence of ego-boundaries and consequent psychic integration with metapersonal systems." (p. 41)

In the dancer's terms, focus was expressed as coming together, feeling connected. A loss of ego was mentioned as well. Compare the following descriptions provided by the dancers in this domain:

> ....a loss of personal ego....(I) was not self conscious. (There was) total involvement and absorption in the dance.
>
> I felt connected....and very involved with the character. The performance was very focused....into the role.
>
> You're channeling everything into one area.
> It just all comes together.
>
> (I) felt connected....Those things...converged on that particular moment.
>
> I was totally absorbed in the dance....

It is particularly important at this point that one recognizes the overlap that peak experience, peak performance and flow have, with one another. As stated previously, it is not the intent of this thesis to discern or identify these states in the dancers specifically. However, it could reinforce the premise that flow states are possibly integral to attaining peak performances and discovering peak experiences.

Domain: Awareness of Others

Total focus and complete involvement unfold naturally into this ninth domain. The properties belonging to this domain are: *lack of awareness of other dancers, no concern with things, unaware of people outside of the performing unit, unaware of the audience at all* or *totally connected and at one with the audience.* This domain also includes the feeling that *the audience was aware of the enhanced performance moment.*

The athlete can be so completely absorbed in the task that nothing and no one else can intrude on the moment (Ravizza, 1984):

> "The conduct of the crowd (and/or other distractions)....are physical or mental distractions that are not part of the athlete's consciousness." (p. 456)

Therefore, depending on what is important to the focus of that particular performance, external people or things may or may not be a part of the enhanced performance state. In altered states of consciousness (ASC), interaction with the environment can be involved or detached (Tart, 1975). Communication with others can also be altered. Nideffer (1992), suggests that athletes experience and process external information without conscious thought and maintain internal focus without significant or conscious interruption. When experienced, they are able to take in the entire atmosphere, including an audience, without interference.

The dancers' awareness of the audience depended on the type of performance. Clearly, the audience could be a distraction if the dancer needed to be totally focused in the dance, uninvolved with the audience and neutralizing their presence. On the other hand, if the dancer needed to communicate something vitally important to the creation of the choreography, then reaching the minds and collective subconscious of the audience mattered significantly. Dana felt she had succeeded in her aesthetic communication when the audience's reaction during company bows provided her with validation.

The audience knew I was having this incredible moment.

Figure skater, Toller Cranston (Murphy and White, 1978), describes an audience connection experience:

> "The audience was still, watching intently, anticipating.....(At one point) I felt an electric shock run through the crowd. They understood. In that brief instant we fused. Reality no longer existed and time became suspended.....We could feel it.....It was something beyond love; beyond reality." (p. 125)

Other researchers have commented on the influence that external viewers or individuals have on performance. Aspects or conditions, such as 'others influenced outcome', 'other people interactive', 'others were paying attention', and 'others gave sense of well being', (Privette and Bundrick, 1992), (Privette 1982), contribute to the research in the experiences of flow, peak performance and peak experience.

Domain: Noticed by Outside Others

The dancers knew their enhanced performance states were rare and valuable occurrences. Maslow (1975) states peak experience is self validating and carries its own intrinsic value with it. Likewise, the flow experience is considered autotelic or worth doing for its own sake (Csikszentmihalyi, 1993). All of this is true for the dancers in their enhanced performance experiences. However, most of them received

further validation from company members, artistic directors, or audience members. The tenth domain is composed of those confirmations or validation to the dancers that their particular performance was extraordinary and like no other. It is also the most unexpected finding of this study.

Category IV: After

Domain: Transformation

Post experience reflection by the dancers suggested that significance placed upon the enhanced performance state is far reaching. The experience is a valuable glimpse into a higher state of consciousness, equal to a transformation. Descriptors like 'other-special-different level', 'transcendent experience', 'another world or reality', and 'some zone' comprise the properties, all of which agree with previous research. Ravizza (1984) refers to this feeling of harmony and oneness as a transcendence of self. Athletes describe going beyond the self and transcending the natural levels of perceiving. 'You become more than yourself ....when it happens....' (Murphy and White, 1978). Powers of the individual go beyond normal expectations and leave a feeling of plunging into something new; another reality. Flow experiences, as stated previously, could involve transcendence of individuality and

fusion with the world (Maslow, 1971). Privette's (1983) factors include a feeling that is 'more real than usual reality', 'the transcendence of outer limits', and 'being detached from the world'. This study on modern dancers' enhanced performance states is congruent with the research of others regarding this transcendent element.

Domain: Dancers' Personal Contingency Theories

In one way, this domain brings the study full circle: back to the dancers' descriptions of their modes of responding *when* they experienced an enhanced performance state. The properties of *when* they experienced an enhanced performance state, are the same or similar to the properties discussed here. For example, all the dancers agreed that years of experience in the dance, total absorption in the work, and joy in doing the dance, contributed to the experience of an enhanced performance state. Yet, even with these things in place, no one can guarantee an experience will result. It cannot be coerced. The literature that precedes this study, largely confirms what the dancers affirmed for themselves.

Peak experience requires a mastery of basic skills. Likewise, the flow experience, which must begin with a certain level of skill, training, and discipline, supports the dancers' theories that years of

experience in the dance enabled the enhanced performance state. Focused awareness is manifest by complete absorption in the movement task (Ravizza, 1984). Concentration on the task at hand, resulting with irrelevant stimuli disappearing from consciousness (Csikszentmihalyi, 1993) is part of the peak experience and the flow experience as well. Finally, fun and joy are inherent in all three states: peak experience, peak performance and flow.

Domain: Post Experience Reflection

Peak experiences during an athlete's career are relatively rare but their extraordinary quality acts as a standard, or qualitative reference point, for subjectively evaluating future performances (Ravizza, 1984). They are often considered the greatest moments in an athlete's or dancer's career. In some instances, the experience was viewed as a gift. 'I felt as if I could not take credit for it.' Maslow (1968) says this is not unusual. A feeling of gratitude is also a common consequence. During and after enhanced performance experiences, people feel lucky, fortunate, or graced. Maslow's affirmations or propositions of the aftereffects of peak experiences (1968), state that these experiences can change the view of one's world. It can release him or her for greater creativity, expression and spontaneity. The dancer

seeks to repeat the experience because it is remembered as a very important and desirable happening. 'I'm waiting for the next one...' The dancer is more apt to feel that life in general is worth while. 'No career is worth as much...' Privette and Bundrick (1991) conclude that their respondents found their peak experiences to be turning points.

VI. SUMMARY AND PROPOSITIONAL STATEMENTS

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of professional modern dancers in enhanced performance states. Incorporating in-depth interviews with qualitative research methods, generated thick descriptions of the enhanced performance states as the dancers perceived them. The findings of this study indicate that the phenomena of enhanced performance states are experienced by the professional modern dancer and that the modes of responding may have an impact on when these states occur. Further, some of the qualities and characteristics of the dancers' enhanced performance experiences are unique while many are similar to other states as described in the existing literature and by researchers in sport. A comparison to the athlete in performance is used because information is more readily available on the athlete who has experienced peak performance, peak experience and flow. In addition, the athlete like the dancer experiences altered states of consciousness while participating in a highly physical performance.

An analysis of the four categories, their domains and properties as discussed support that:

I. Enhanced performance states are experienced by modern dancers.

II. Conditions as expressed through the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual modes of responding, conceivably influence the modern dancer preceding the onset of an enhanced performance state.

III. Many of the qualities and characteristics of the enhanced performance state of modern dancers resemble those studied previously in athletes and some others.

Propositional Statements

1. In order to understand how dancers begin to experience enhanced performance states, conditions affecting the dancer in their personal and professional life should be examined.
2. Individual methods of interacting and coping with influences from the dancer's life offstage (whether physical, mental, emotional or spiritual), determine their chances for experiencing enhanced performance states.
3. Performance location and the dancer's configuration within the dance (*where*), positively and/or negatively influence their potential to experience an enhanced performance state.
4. The dancer is unable to evoke an enhanced performance state.

5. The dancer is surprised when an enhanced performance state occurs and only realizes in retrospect what has taken place.
6. Physical and technical skill including years of experience and expertise in a dancer's professional background, are vital indicators of when an enhanced performance state occurs.
7. The experience leaves the dancer in awe and with a sense of achieving perfection.
8. Space, time and normal sensory perceptions are altered during the dancer's enhanced performance state.
9. Emotional feelings become heightened while dancing in an enhanced performance state.
10. The enhanced performance state magnifies the dancer's sense of confidence, empowerment, control and vitality.
11. The dancer feels totally involved and absorbed by the dance and the performance, often losing self consciousness and sense of ego.
12. Things, people or other dancers who are extraneous to the one experiencing this unusual performance focus, lose significance or "disappear" for that time.
13. The dancer's increased performance acuity and intensity during the enhanced performance state could be observed by other

people, particularly those who know the dancer and their usual level of performance.

14. The modern dancer's experiences in an enhanced performance state leave them feeling transformed.
15. The modern dancer's enhanced performance experience surpasses the good or great performance and elevates the experience to a rare, highly valued occurrence that all other performances and many of life's experiences are measured against later. They represent a standard for the dancer's other life experiences.

Moments of highest happiness and exhilarating sensations while performing at a personal best are experiences to aspire toward, whether the subject is a dancer or an athlete. The experiences described in this study of modern dancers in enhanced performance states are similar to those experienced in other athletes and performers. Perhaps the body of information that results from this inquiry will contribute to the understanding of enhanced performance states in all dancers, not just modern dancers. Further research with samples such as professional ballet dancers and/or dancers from the

Broadway stage and musical comedy would help to establish a more complete understanding of the experience of all dancers in enhanced performance states. How would their experiences differ from these modern dancers'?

Although this inquiry does not ultimately attempt to categorize the dancers' experiences into the previously defined states of peak experience, peak performance and flow, it is probable that the modern dancers' experiences qualify as one or more of these states. Perhaps it would be useful to investigate the dancer's enhanced performance state further using quantitative methods in combination with qualitative methods. For example, Kimiecik and Stein (1992) suggest interviews in combination with the experience sampling method for measuring flow. By pursuing the interaction of the dancer and the conditions that may underlie the experience, researchers can go beyond what is presently known in this area. Ultimately, this inquiry may suggest future levels of investigation and invite new designs with which to seek out and understand enhanced performing states.

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APPENDIX A

PROJECT: AN INQUIRY INTO THE EXPERIENCES OF MODERN DANCERS IN ENHANCED PERFORMANCE STATES

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INFORMED CONSENT FORM

This is to certify that I, _____
(print name) hereby agree to participate as a volunteer in the above named project.

The purpose of this study and the interview procedures have been explained to me. I hereby give permission to be interviewed, and for these interviews to be recorded on audio-tape, for investigative use in the above named project. I understand that my identity will be kept confidential and that my name and the name of those I dance with/for or teach (if they should come up in the interview) will be kept confidential.

I understand that I am free to refuse to answer questions during the interview and/or request that the recorder be turned off during any part of the interview if I am uncomfortable or not satisfied with that portion of the interview, for any reason.

I have been given the opportunity to ask whatever questions I desire, and they have been answered to my satisfaction. I acknowledge receipt of this consent form.

Signed,

_____ _____
Interviewee (print)

_____ _____
Interviewer (print)

_____ _____
Witness (print)

APPENDIX B

AN INQUIRY INTO THE EXPERIENCES OF MODERN DANCERS IN ENHANCED PERFORMANCE STATES

Participant Demographic Data

To be completed by the participant:

Date of interview: _____

1. Name: _____

2. Age: _____ Age when you started dancing:_____

3. How many years have you danced professionally? _____

Describe briefly where and with whom:_____

_____

_____

_____

4. Current professional status:_____

_____

_____

_____

5. Dominant technique/style: _____

6. Other influences: _____

_____

_____